

THE SHIFT FROM A DECLINE TO STABILIZATION AS IT RELATES TO
AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN IN MARRIAGE AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE
BLACK CHURCH

By

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A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Submitted to
New York Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

New York, New York

2020

ABSTRACT

THE SHIFT FROM A DECLINE TO STABILIZATION AS IT RELATES TO AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN IN MARRIAGE AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE BLACK CHURCH

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This dissertation looks at the continuous decline of African American men in marriage and relationships in the black church. The first goal is to understand the biblical underpinnings of marriage and relationships. Could the decline of African American men in marriage and meaningful relationships be the result of a broken covenantal relationship with God? The first goal is communicating the problem through a seminar, conducted to teach participants about covenant theology and what it means to be in a good relationship with God and one's partner. The second goal is theological and deals with forgiveness and reconciliation. How does the theory of forgiveness leading to reconciliation apply to marriage and relationships? What theological voices can empower married couples to recognize the covenantal underpinnings of their relationship? A workshop was conducted on how marriage entails a determination to work through difficulties. The last goal is sociological and cultural. What social behaviors and cultural changes contribute to the decline of African American men in marriages and relationships as it relates to the black church? This goal was addressed through the preached word, where it was emphasized that cultural bias and structural sins are detrimental to African American marriage and relationships.

This is dedicated to the memory of the late Rev. Dr. Johnnie G. McCann Sr.

Acknowledgments

As I commenced the writing of my dissertation, I was encouraged by the outcome of the goals that we set out to fulfill. I would be remiss if I did not mention the dedication of my Site Team who labored along with me to bring the desired outcome to fruition. The fulfillment of the goals can be determined by what was promised in the Proposal Challenge Statement. I am thankful for the help and guidance of my professors and the staff who help make New York Theological Seminary the great school that it is for all of us. Last, but not least, I thank my lovely wife Terry who was part of the Site Team. Without her, I could not have made it this far.

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INTRODUCTION

The Rev. Dr. Johnnie G. McCann Sr. passed away on August 21, 2019, while on a cruise with his dear wife, Tesalane, and members of the Saint Luke's Baptist Church where he served as the Senior Pastor for over thirty years. My wife Terry and I, along with the Site Team and the Participants in this Demonstration Project, are saddened by the sudden death of this loving and caring man of God, who has been a blessing to us with his passionate teaching, humor and knowledge of how we can have sustainable marriages and relationships in the black church.

I had been friends with Johnnie for over twenty-two years and was blessed by his humility and gracious spirit. When I shared with him my quest to attain a Doctor of Ministry Degree, he immediately suggested that I look into what Drew Theological Seminary had to offer (which I knew he would because it is his alma mater). Furthermore, Dr. McCann also was an adjunct professor as well as their most successful recruiter.

Dr. McCann invited me to an alumni luncheon and introduced me to one of the deans, who talked to me about the Doctor of Ministry Degree and the requirements. I was almost persuaded. However, since I had already graduated from New York Theological Seminary (NYTS) and was a teacher's assistant (TA) in the Pastoral Care and Counseling Degree Program, I decided to pursue my degree with NYTS.

After my first year in the Doctor of Ministry Degree Program, I decided on the subject for my dissertation. I approached Dr. McCann at the Baptist Ministers Conference

of Greater New York and Vicinity, where he served as the First Vice-President, and shared with him that my dissertation will be about “The Decline of African American Men in Marriage and Relationships in the Black Church.” Before I got a chance to ask him if he would consider being the facilitator of the seminar and educational workshop, he said, “Is there anything I can help you with?”

By the grace of God, I tried to do all I could to complete this dissertation in such a way that the readers will know that Dr. Johnnie McCann’s presence has left an indelible mark on our lives, and that our marriages and relationships in the black church are stronger because of his teachings. So, I pushed past my pain, with God’s help, and submitted to His will knowing that He is too wise to make a mistake and too loving and caring for all of His servants to not fill the void in our darkest hour.

The apostle Paul said it all: “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5: 8 NIV). Dr. McCann, you have touched so many lives that only heaven can reveal. You have fought a good fight!

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day-and not only me, but also to all who longed for his appearing (2 Tm 4: 7-8 NIV).

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

Since 1932, Canaan Baptist Church of Christ in Harlem, New York has been a beacon of light, shining brightly across the globe, bringing hope to weary travelers in search of truth. The hand of God has worked mightily within this congregation to bring Canaan from its humble beginnings, in 1932, to its historic achievements in this present day. It began when a group of forty-one souls, committed to the truth of the Gospel and determined to live for Christ, decided to leave Mt. Moriah Baptist Church. Calling themselves the “Israelite Mission,” they formally organized and founded Canaan Baptist on September 26, 1932, led by the first pastor, Rev. Middleton. After the passing of Rev. Middleton, the disciples and their second pastor, Rev. Edward M. Moore, moved to a building on W. 118th Street. The membership grew to the point where they had to move into a larger place. They purchased the former Loews Theater on 116th Street. Shortly after they moved into their new place of worship, tragedy struck their leader and pastor and he passed away suddenly.

After a search for a new pastor that lasted over a year, the congregation voted to have the Rev. Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker as their senior pastor in 1967. Dr. Walker served this congregation for nearly 37 years before he retired in 2004 and became Pastor Emeritus. Another project could be written of what this gifted servant of God did and how he put the word “historic” in front of what is now the Historic Canaan Baptist Church of Christ.

In the year 2005, the Canaan family called on the Reverend Dr. Thomas D. Johnson to be the new Senior Pastor, and he is presently serving this congregation and the Harlem community, which has been hard hit by gentrification.

The Ministry, Mission, and the Spirituality of the Congregation

The ministries of the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ seek to use whatever gifts, talents, skills and abilities God has given us to serve Him and the needs of others. The ministries of Canaan seek to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ. Canaan has more than forty ministries. Our spotlight ministries highlight our most important work.

Christian Education

The mission of the Christian Education Commission is to provide oversight and guidance to all teaching programs within the church:

- (1) To develop a biblically literate congregation;
- (2) To provide on-going training for the church membership and leadership; and
- (3) To develop sound educational objectives for the church membership.

Diaconate Ministry

The Diaconate Ministry is made up of men and women who are ordained Servants of God. They serve the needs of the congregation. They visit the sick and shut-in, serve communion, and are responsible for the greater good. They assist our pastor in the discharge of his responsibilities.

HIV/AIDS Ministry

In response to the growing pandemic of HIV/AIDS in New York, the nation, and the world, the Vivian L. Potter HIV Ministry has accepted the challenge to minister to the infected and affected. Their holistic approach is to provide general education, advocacy, assistance in obtaining the most recent information, and access to resources and referrals.

This is undergirded by spiritual support, pastoral care, and Christian education to sensitize the need for awareness and compassion within the church and the worldwide community.

Missionary Ministry

Missionaries are to be the presence of Christ in the world. Their mission is to evangelize, spreading the gospel throughout the world. The Missionary Ministry accomplishes this through intercessory prayer, visitation, scripture reading, food distribution, educational workshops, and donations of clothing and money.

Music Ministry

In the African American religious experience, music plays a very important part in the worship service. The significance of our music is rooted in the history of the slave experience in America. Our ancestors, as slaves, sang spirituals to keep them spiritually connected to the God they prayed to. Music was a way of survival.

Canaan's Music Ministry is vibrant and uplifting. It consists of spirituals, hymns, gospel, anthems, and prayer and praise team ensembles to warm up the congregation and lift everyone to their feet in praise of an awesome God. Each Sunday you will hear the amazing voices of either the Canaan Mass Choir, the Male Chorus, the Sanctuary Choir, the Silver Strands, the Voices of Canaan, (VOC), the Wyatt Tee Walker (WTW) Inspirational Chorus, the Young Adult Ministry (YAM) Choir or the Church School Choir, accompanied by a full spectrum of musicians.

Youth Ministry

The mission of the Youth Ministry is to win the souls of young people of all ages. This is why we have provided a Church School every Saturday from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. The ages served are from 5 to 17 years old. The young people are taught the word of

God, and those who need tutorial help are assisted in our Robert Francis Learning Center. Our students also learn how to participate in the youth worship service that is designed for them every second Sunday of the month. They preside, read the scripture, and lead in prayer and singing. The youth are also taken to cultural events that take place in various parts of our city and state.

Ushers Ministry

The Ushers provide the initial introductions to the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ worship experience by greeting our disciples, visitors and friends. The Ushers, represented by persons of all ages, exhibit both dedication and experience as they assist with the orderly conduct of our worship service.

Young Adults Ministry

The Young Adults Ministry's mission is to praise and glorify God, as well as gain an understanding of God's word and teachings as they apply in our lives; to provide an open forum where young adults can meet regularly to discuss the various spiritual issues their age group faces; to provide support and fellowship while keeping in the work of the Lord; to motivate one another to maintain their walk of faith and continue to glorify God in all that they do; and to be a social group of positive influence providing guidance and direction towards a life of purpose and self-discovery.

Social Action Commission

Bringing about social justice is a part of the Christian duty. God expects the church to speak out against injustice and inequity in the world and to work to bring justice to the oppressed. The Social Action Commission is a non-partisan, issue-oriented, multi-faceted ministry, whose primary objective is to be an effective Church and community organizing catalyst.

The mission of the Social Action Commission is to heighten the awareness of the church and community regarding social action issues, to increase awareness around socio-political issues, and to empower our disciples to speak truth to power, in faithful service to our rich history and legacy as a church of social justice.

Our Other Ministries

Worship

- Commission on Evangelism
- Dance the Word
- Deaf Ministry
- Prayer and Praise Ministry
- Pulpit Aid

Fellowship

- Basketball Ministry
- Birthday Ministry
- Single Parent's Ministry
- Church School Choir
- Fishermen's Fellowship
- New Disciples Ministry

Service

- Audio/Media Ministry
- Caretakers Ministry
- Culinary Ministry
- Hosts and Hostesses Ministry
- Official Board
- Publication Ministry

Education

- Adult Literary Ministry
- Baptist Training Union (BTU)
- Bible Study

- Church School
- Robert Francis Learning Center
- Scholarship and Career Development Commission

Social Services

- Bethesda Counseling and Wellness Services
- Housing Services
- Lydia Project
- Prison Ministry
- Senior Services Center
- Vivian L. Potter HIV Ministry

This is very much an overview of the Ministry and Mission of the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ so let me briefly elaborate on the spirituality of the congregation as I see it. The members of Canaan have been blessed with pastors and ministers over the years who are called to the ministry and are seminary trained. They preach with passion, knowledge, and with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. I serve as Pastor of Evangelism with a vision to reach out to a cross-cultural community due to gentrification in the Harlem Community. I also follow up on those who become new disciples. I am actively engaged in every aspect of the pastoral ministry in this church as well as the community.

The church is engaged in biblical studies as well as prayer meetings, which help the congregation in their spiritual growth where their spirituality is challenged not only in the church but in the world they live in. The awareness of their spirituality is shown in their testimony of how God made a way for them in times of need, some way or another.

Canaan Baptist Church of Christ has experienced changes over the years, but the ministry, mission, and spirituality have not changed. As I mentioned at the beginning of

this profile, the Rev. Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker was the person who thrust this church forward and it became a model for ministry throughout this city.

On March 24, 1968, the iconic Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. installed Rev. Dr. Wyatt T. Walker as Senior Pastor of Canaan Baptist Church. Canaan's legacy as a church of social action brought some of the greatest preachers and dignitaries in the world to our pulpit, including Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Sr., Rev. Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor, Rev. Dr. Gardner C. Taylor, Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes Jr., Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright Jr., South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Rev. Jesse Jackson and Rev. Al Sharpton. Historically, Canaan was Nelson Mandela's first stop on his first visit to the United States as President of South Africa.

After suffering four strokes, the Harlem pastor, theologian, human rights activist, cultural historian, prolific writer, and the nation's foremost authority on the music of the African-American religious experience, retired from Canaan in October 2004. In great appreciation for his dedication, selfless service, and inspired leadership, the church conferred on Dr. Walker the title of Pastor Emeritus.

In 2005, the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ called the Rev. Dr. Thomas D. Johnson to lead the church and he is still leading Canaan. He is an excellent preacher and teacher with a lot of experience in ministry. However, being the successor to Wyatt Tee Walker is a large task and it would have been for most any pastor that followed him.

Some of the members' expectations were just unrealistic and when they were faced with the fact that he was not a "second coming" of Dr. Walker, they left Canaan. There was a lot of disharmony in the church that included some members of the official board. The church lost a large number of members, which affected the church's budget.

But the loss of membership had to do, not only with the change in leadership, but also the onset of gentrification. This has not only impacted our church but many churches in Harlem as well.

I would like to see the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ become more cross-cultural. To become a cross-cultural church will not only mean that we must adopt a new method of evangelism, but the leadership must be willing to accept changes that will challenge some of their fears that have already been expressed. According to the demographics that have been prepared for Canaan Baptist Church of Christ by the Precept Group that deals within a 3.0-mile radius of our church, Anglos now make up 37% of the population, followed by Hispanics at 34%, and African Americans 19%.

Through gentrification, the African American churches have lost membership because there is not enough affordable housing. Our church has a line of over 100 visitors from all over the world who fill our balcony every Sunday. What I have found out as Pastor of Evangelism is that, in this line are people who live in the Harlem community. Some church officials fear that if they become a part of our church, they will try and take it over. One of our officials told me they can join, but not as members of the official board.

Our church has two escalators that carry people up to a large area that is called Founders Hall. In Founders Hall are portraits of all the founding members from 1932, including some members who are still living. Founders Hall is where we hold banquets, plays, and other large events.

We also have a place on the first floor called Liberation Tower, where the pastors, official board, and the choir meet and have prayer before we enter into the sanctuary for our Sunday morning service.

On the second floor, we have one of the most important artifacts on display that tells the story of the history of the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ. It is the original pulpit and it speaks about the various men and women of God who, over the 86 years of the history of our church, proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ for the salvation of our souls, as well as spoke truth to the powers that be. I already mentioned the names of many iconic people who stood behind that pulpit and spoke to our congregation. There are so many others from around this world who spoke from this pulpit that I will not mention, but there is a name I cannot leave out and that is me, and I am glad that I had that opportunity.

The Programs that Best Represent the Congregation's Ministry, Mission and Spirituality

The programs that best represent our ministry are our Sunday morning worship service and Sunday school; Wednesday prayer and preaching services at 1:00 PM and 7:00 PM; Thursday Bible study; Saturday church school; Senior citizen center from Monday to Friday; and senior housing (2 four story buildings). In addition to these, those that best represent the mission include the nursing home, prison ministry, social action commission, Lydia project, and the sacrificial offering to feed the hungry and provide clothing and shelter. Our disciples often find spirituality in worship and service to the Lord that includes prayer and meditation.

The Programs that Demonstrate the Weakness of the Congregation

In my opinion, it is the afternoon Sunday services that happen a few times a year like the fall anniversary of ministries, the dedication of officers, as well as the fall revival. They can and should be incorporated into the Sunday morning service. The afternoon services are poorly attended.

Identity and Tradition

The Canaan Baptist Church follows a tradition that is rooted in the southern culture more than northern. The disciples of Canaan from its early beginnings were from the south and that is still prevalent today. It is a certain style of singing, praying, testifying, and preaching. They love songs that tell their story. “Down through the years the Lord’s been good to me, He put food on my table, a roof over my head.” They still enjoy those old songs.

Our Deacons still invoke in their prayers the traditional prayers heard in the old southern church, “and when our journey is over down here, give us a place in heaven.” The testimony still rings out a southern sound of where the Lord brought me from. The preaching is still appreciated with a whoop at the end.

Canaan Baptist Church of Christ is also traditional in its Sunday morning attire. The preachers wear robes; the deacons have a dress code on first Sundays; and women trustees wear hats. Missionaries also wear white on the first Sundays. Our style of worship is traditional, probably more so than I would like it to be. The choir still processions into the choir stand. We repeat the Affirmation of Faith; after the general tithes and offering, we stand and sing, “All things come of thee”; and after the scripture is read, we stand up and sing, “Glory to the Father.” Every first Sunday, which is communion Sunday, we stand and read a rather lengthy Church Covenant.

Canaan Baptist Church of Christ is a member of the Progressive National Baptist Convention and is involved in the local, state, regional, and national meetings. Our church, with its tradition, still has enough of new ministries to be of help to some who love the praise and worship style as well as a dynamic praise dance ministry. There are no tensions between the congregation's local history and its wider tradition.

Ethos

The disciples of our church have a healthy sense of their past struggles in a society (past and present) who have to be constantly reminded that we are somebody. Our ancestors were slaves in a strange land and stripped of their humanity, identity, and dignity, and subjected to the worst kind of brutality and cruelty that an evil mind can conceive. After the liberation from slavery came the birth of Jim Crow, a caste system of white supremacy that made African Americans second-class citizens. They went from exploitation to marginalization of Black people.

In opposition to constant injustice by Jim Crow, a movement came to fruition known as the Civil Rights Movement led by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and this is the ethos of the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ. We are a prophetic community with social action as its core, and we model from the scripture that Jesus stood up in the synagogue and quoted Isaiah the prophet (Luke 4:18).

Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker, my pastor and friend, passed away on January 24, 2018 at his home in Chester, Virginia, at the age of 88. He was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s chief of staff, and the main strategist for the August 28, 1963 March on Washington DC, as well as many other important events in the civil rights movement. Those who I already mentioned who stood behind the pulpit and proclaimed the prophetic word of God that spoke truth to power tell the stories about the model of the Canaan congregation.

The church's beliefs and values are our personal salvation, sacrament, and symbols that can be seen throughout the community (e.g., the two Senior Citizens apartment buildings and affordable housing). Also, when we pass by the places where we do ministry, they remind us of our calling to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and those that are in prison. Jesus declared in Matthew 25, that as you have done it to the least of my people, you did it unto me.

Canaan Baptist Church of Christ has a ritual in almost all of its meetings, whether business or programs. Before the start of the meeting, you must read a scripture and pray. Those who want to become members of Canaan must attend our new discipleship classes. If you are a leader, or want to be one, you must be a tither. We are a tithing congregation; we emphasize tithes and offerings and each member gets a box of envelopes.

Context

Canaan Baptist Church of Christ has over 700 members, 98% of whom are African Americans. Adult women make up more than 73%, adult men 18%, and children about 9%. The average age of the congregation is 56. Incomes average around \$67,000 (middle class). Over 36% of Canaan's members have college degrees or higher.

Canaan is equipped to service those who are deaf and those with other types of disability. The deaf ministry is available during our worship services. Not only do we distribute a weekly bulletin to keep our members informed, but we also make use of our wide screen monitors that are visible for all our congregation. We provide CDs and DVDs for those who would like to purchase a copy of our recorded Sunday morning service, and those who cannot attend service can livestream it. Our church is open seven days a week.

The senior pastor is the CEO of our church. He has an official board that includes deacons, trustees, and the president of the congregation. The pastoral staff has twelve ordained ministers who assist the senior pastor and three ministers in training. There are eight women and seven men on our pastoral staff. I have already reflected on the theological issues but let me state this again. We put emphasis on prophetic religion and there is no doubt that it will continue.

I have served in the ministry of this church as youth pastor, pastor of evangelism, and now on the Canaan senior citizens board that is community-oriented. I have been faithful throughout my ministry in this church and have the trust of the people, Senior Pastor, as well as the Official Board. On June 30th, I celebrated fifty years in ministry since my ordination. The only thing that is at stake for me is to finish my course, which I set out on in this tedious journey to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and to reach my goal to earn the Doctor of Ministry Degree from New York Theological Seminary.

CHAPTER 2 BIBLICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF MARRIAGE

We determined that our first goal would be to understand the biblical underpinnings of marriage and relationships through a seminar. This seminar would address covenant theology and the first of three questions, which we formulated.

“Could the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships, as it relates to the Black Church, be the result of a broken covenant with God?” (Mal. 2:13-14 NASB) This question will be addressed later when the responses to a survey that the participants contributed to will be discussed.

We understood that the importance of the seminar dealing with the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships in the black church would require someone who is knowledgeable in marriage and relationships from an African American perspective as well as covenant theology. We chose the Rev. Dr. Johnny G. McCann Sr. who was the Senior Pastor of Saint Luke Baptist Church in Harlem, New York City. He also served as a professor on the faculty at Drew Theological Seminary in Madison, New Jersey. Dr. McCann was also the first-vice president of the Ministers Conference of Greater New York and Vicinity. He is well known as a specialist in marriage and relationships and conducts seminars and workshops all over the country and in the Jamaica West Indies. Dr. McCann was a prolific writer and had authored twenty-three books. He came to us well equipped.

There were about thirty-five participants in the seminar composed of single, married, separated, and divorced persons. Most of the participants understood the purpose

of this seminar and were looking to have more sustainable relationships now or in the future.

Marriage is a Covenant and the Relationship is Covenantal

Dr. McCann, in his own unique way, describes the marriage relationship as a triangle. At the bottom of the triangle, the widest parallel point, he places the word earth. On the right-hand side, where the triangle is both vertical and slanted toward the pinnacle, he writes the word ‘man’. On the left-hand side of the triangle, both vertical and slanted toward the pinnacle, is the word ‘woman’. At the top (the pinnacle), where the triangle comes to its narrow point, the word ‘God’ in heaven is inserted.

The earth is where fallen humanity lives under the curse of sin caused by the fall of the first Adam (the earthy man) and therefore now separated from God. So, the widest part of the triangle represents our relationships apart from our creator. It is not possible for us to have sustainable relationships with each other when we are separated from God due to the result of a broken covenant.

The vertical slanting (narrowing) triangle on both sides representing man and woman can now become closer in their relationship when they seek God first and foremost. God in heaven (on top of the pinnacle) should be our main focus and desire to please, honor, and worship. What now makes it possible for us to draw closer to our creator is the work of the second Adam (from heaven), the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:22 NASB).

Dr. McCann’s analogy of the triangle certainly makes sense in marriages and relationships when we look at it with our spiritual minds. God has created us for His glory and to have fellowship with Him through covenant relationship. For instance, it was God who created both man and woman. “God created man in His own image, in the

image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27 NASB) It was God who said that it was not good for man to be alone, so he made the woman to be a suitable partner for him. God placed them in the Garden of Eden and gave them instructions of what trees were good for food and a stern warning not to eat from the tree in the midst of the garden, which was the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God told them that if they violate this command, they would surely die.

Needless to say, the command that God had given to the man and woman was broken when the serpent deceived Eve (as will be explained later) to violate God’s command, and they were driven out of the garden. Their sin caused them to be separated from God and the innocence that they enjoyed in their fellowship with God and the peace they had with each other. Their sin had an effect on all creation, humanity, animals, environment, and the cosmos (Rom. 8:22). Dr. McCann explains it in this manner. The word “benediction” means good-diction, good words. God spoke a benediction over His creation (Gen. 1:31 NRSV). God saw everything that he had made and, indeed, it was very good.

Dr. McCann goes on to explain the word “malediction” and it is the opposite from benediction’. The first part of the word (mal) means bad, so mal-ediction is not good. It is in this context that the Lord God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner” (Gen. 2: 18 NRSV).

Dr. McCann stated, “Women were made to complete man, not to compete with him.” He has now gotten the attention of all the participants in the room when he gives an analogy of “Lenox china versus paper plates.” Let me take this time to evaluate Lenox china in today’s market, so we can better understand Dr. McCann’s analogy in relation to

marriage and relationships. As described in a post in the aptly named Invaluable online marketplace,

Unlike other brands whose brilliance began to wane as the 21st century approached, Lenox stayed true to their aim to produce expertly crafted ceramic ware. As a result, their designs dating into the 1960s and 1970s are as in demand among collectors as their patterns of decades past.¹

Dr. McCann puts emphasis on the plates being laced with pure gold. That china is used for special occasions and not for everyday use. Paper plates can be used on non-important occasions. He said, “When it comes to your wife, you should always treat her precious like Lenox China. Tell her you love her every day. Pray together and show each other affection every day.”

Understand how She is Wired.

Dr. McCann makes a point in this seminar that will help us understand the difference in how women and men think. I had to consult knowledgeable sources to validate the theory that men and women are wired differently.

Society does not treat men and women equally. And yes, we are physically different, but do we think any differently? Well, the answer is yes, but not as much as you might think.

Women are generally better at language tasks, and men on the average are somewhat better at organizing things in space. But really there is much more variability within the sexes than there is between the sexes. But that starts to change when you look at the brain. Here, there are clear differences. The most obvious one is that men on the average have a 10 percent larger brain by volume. But women have about 15-30 percent thicker cortical grey matter—and that’s the good stuff. That is the stuff, which does the thinking.

So, is it just a difference in size? Well, no!

¹ Invaluable, “Inside the Archives: Lenox China Prices,” <https://www.invaluable.com/blog/inside-the-archives-lenox-china-prices/> (accessed August 1, 2019).

Women's brains seem to be fairly balanced between the left and the right hemisphere...whereas men seem to rely far more heavily on the right side of their brains.

And it doesn't stop there. There are differences in the places where we process rewards and emotions.

Take hormones—men have more testosterone and women have more progesterone and estrogen—but these don't just act as hormones. These chemicals act as neurotransmitters. They change the way we think, even down to the level of DNA. Men have a Y chromosome; women don't. Men's neurons have different machinery to women's. Eventually, you start realizing that the question isn't, why do we think differently, it's why don't we think more differently.

Part of it is because our brains are very plastic. They can adapt to tasks maybe they weren't especially designed for. But a more interesting idea is that maybe we're using different strategies to solve the same problem.

Take IQ. Men have larger brains, so technically they should have higher IQs. But they don't! They have the same IQs as women's, and that might be because women have thicker grey matter, so they have more neurons – two different strategies to come to the same solution.²

Dr. Johnnie McCann has science on his side when he said that men and women are wired differently. He said, women multitask. They can cook, feed the children, and change their diapers, talk on the phone, and do laundry all at the same time. A man cannot write a check if he is interfered with. Men can suffer in silence. He could have been told his job will be eliminated next year; you may have to travel to another city to work; or the visit to the doctor's office revealed that you have a health issue. And yet you feel that you can't share it with anyone right now.

A woman will tell it all. She is vocal and will not hesitate to tell you about her situation. She will not suffer in silence. She will not go to sleep without telling about the events that took place during the day. Women generally are vocal and expressive. It is said

² Alistair Jennings, "Do Men and Women Think Differently?," *Inside Science*, June 1, 2017, <https://www.insidescience.org/video/do-men-and-women-think-differently> (accessed August 1, 2019).

that women can speak on an average 25,000 words a day, while men average 10,000. When most men come home from work, they are almost finished with their words. So, men, when you ask your wife how her day went, be prepared for a long conversation and talk with her. She still has a lot more of her 25,000 words to articulate to you, so please try not to go to sleep before she's finished.

Men are to be Lovers and Leaders

The problem is that far too many men have become lovers and leavers. Every relationship will go through some periods of difficulty no matter how strong your relationship may be. We must hang in there during the storms. The problem is that we choose to pull out or instead of hanging in there until the storm is over.

Dr. McCann gives us the stock market analogy. He bought some stock and had it for a while, but his stock took a hit and he was afraid of losing money. His broker advised him to hold firm and wait until this downward plunge is over because it will recover. He was impatient and opted out. The market on his stock recovered and he would have made a lot more money if he had held out.

He also stated that the culture of this world is antithetical to biblical marriage. Biblical marriage is based on a covenant. We make these vows before God and witnesses and when the vows are violated most of it results in emotional stress that tears at the very fabric of our heart. So, the covenant theology is at the core of the marriage vows. The question I proposed was, "Could the decline of African American men in marriage and relationship, be the result of a broken covenant with God?"

McCann gave us what he calls the "3 P's" that God expects men to be as leaders in their homes.

Priest: A priest brings the people to God. A prophet is one who brings God to the people. The man has the responsibility to set the spiritual atmosphere for his family. Praying for and with your spouse cannot only be uplifting to each other, but it brings the presence of God into your relationship, therefore receiving His direction and favor. It would be very difficult for any relationship to go astray when you ask God to get involved with every area of your relationship. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart. And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5-6).

Protector: Men are the protectors of their spouses and children. “Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5: 25 NRSV). Every husband has the responsibility and honor to protect his wife. Dr. McCann told us about the time a man came into his church and held a knife to his wife’s throat. He said he came to her aid immediately with no thought of his own life. The bottom line is that a man should love his wife in a way that he would be willing to die to protect her. That is exactly what Christ did for the church.

Provider: Men, nobody can take your place. A woman cannot be both mother and father in the family no matter how much you’ve heard to the contrary. “Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life-so that nothing may hinder your prayers” (1 Pet. 3:7-9 NRSV).

Husbands as providers go far beyond being employed so you can have a roof over your head, food and clothing, and all the other necessities. Many wives are employed and

have been providing for themselves long before they met their husbands. But do you as a husband provide your presence? There is a ministry of presence!

We are going to park here for a while. Dr. McCann has a lot to say on the ministry of presence. Men, as you share your life together with your wives understand who she is so that you can properly honor her. The scripture that is shared with us in (1 Pet. 3:7-9) suggests that we should be knowledgeable concerning women and what it means to honor them as the weaker sex, because if you misinterpret this text you may find yourself classified as a male chauvinist (and rightly so), thereby jeopardizing your relationship and marriage. Husbands, study your wives and know what they want and desire of you. What's her favorite color? What turns her on (and what upsets her)? She is studying you! You are her covering! Celebrate the beauty of marriage.

Let me share with you an excerpt from Dr. McCann's book.

One of the greatest places of higher learning within a marriage is within a husband's or wife's own backyard. When we are intense listeners to our mates, we learn a tremendous amount of knowledge. We learn about the pain and plight of the opposite sex from an intimate perspective.³

We often learn the purpose behind the idiosyncrasies of our mate. The knowledge that a husband and wife can learn is priceless. Again, the scripture from 1 Peter gives light on the power of being a learner—"Dwell with them according to knowledge." You should know your mate's favorite color, favorite perfume/cologne, favorite foods, favorite restaurant, size of clothing (shoes, dress, pants, shirt, blouse, etc.), dislikes, and family history.

³ J. G. McCann Sr., *Great Pearls from the Biblical Treasure Chest on Christian Marriage* (New York: JGM Ministries, 2002).

I strongly suggest to couples that are dating to become good friends before becoming great lovers. It is during the courtship phase of a relationship that the friendship is solidified by virtue of the knowledge being exchanged personally. The Holy Bible declares, “My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6). Your relationship with your mate should be an ongoing school of learning.

With so many relationships ending as fast as they start, rising cases of infidelity, and private affairs being exposed on social media, it is more important than ever for us to understand the building blocks of a successful Black relationship. An article in the United Black America website presents five tips for a successful relationship: 1) define a successful relationship; 2) consistent communication is crucial; 3) dialogue verse debate; 4) use “and” instead of “but”; 5) always look for compromise but never conform.⁴

Define a Successful Relationship

In order to avoid some tension, misunderstandings, anger and frustrations in the future you must sit down and discuss what you want (don’t want) in your relationships. Your relationship is of utmost importance and should be treated as such. Remember, if you fail to plan, then you plan to fail. Marriages and relationships in the life of African American soul mates are vital to our community and models that our children and young folks can aspire to be. A successful relationship, if properly planned and from time to time reevaluated can be a blessing spiritually, socially, and economically.

⁴ “5 Tips for Maintaining a Successful Black Relationship,” *United Black America*. <http://unitedblackamerica.org/black-relationships/> (accessed April 2, 2018).

Consistent Communication is Crucial

When I think about communication between my wife and me from its earlier stages until the present, I realize that apart from clear and intentional communication there's no way we could have the unity and the understanding of what we mean to each other. For us communication has been progressive resulting in giving in and standing firm on issues that affect our peace and stability. It's always better to be open and honest to each other and to communicate your doubt and fears even if it seems uncomfortable. When you love your partner and are willing to support them where they are weak you exhibit strength not weakness. There are some things that you have learned about your partner because they communicated with you some hurts and pains of the past so you are more sensitive to them and make sure you are their covering and will not be the source of past hurts and pain.

Dialogue Versus Debate

The meaning of the word dialogue when it comes to communication with your partner is "to discuss areas of disagreement frankly in order to resolve them." It was the late Billy Graham who said; if two of you agree on everything, then one of you is not needed. Dialogue has been helpful in my marriage and I have learned that it is a good way to resolve a problem. Debate can be exasperating in your relationship. A debate can lead to quarreling and arguing when you allow every little thing to be debatable. If you learn to be cooler, calmer, more collected and not threatening your partner may find you more attractive. Make sure that you debate the important things concerning your future, finances, and goals in life for your children.

Use “And” instead of “But”

There can be a notable difference in how you use words, especially to your partner, if you want your relationship to be more fruitful. The sentence, “I am **the** man,” was a problem for me personally when I was a young married man. I would use that word to describe my ignorance to my now former wife because of what was mirrored to me by my father; “I am the man”; I’m head of this house! The words that would have been more appropriate when you are in an intense situation are; “I am **a** man,” and therefore, etc. Just one small word can make a difference in how your partner views the situation positive or negative.

Always Look For Compromise but Never Conform

The path to a relationship that enhances the uniqueness of each other is how to accept and deal with differences in a way that upholds the respect and dignity of your partner. That means there will be compromises you both have to make so that the relationship can grow. No relationship has to compromise values, because to do that is to conform to something less than who you are. Always appreciate and value each other for who you are and let them know how much they mean to you. When you accentuate the positive things that you enjoy together, it will draw you closer together and your differences will make you stronger.

What does the scripture mean when it said women are the weaker sex? Men are stronger from the waist up, and women are stronger from the waist down. So, waist up, men are stronger and can pick up and carry more heavy objects than women. From the waist down women are stronger than men. Women are built to carry babies for up to nine months and they continue to engage in their careers and daily activities sometimes up to the time of their delivery.

We need to celebrate the beauty of marriage and the bond that covers both partners. You are each other's covering! "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up" (Eccles. 4: 9-12 NIV).

Peace at home is something African American men treasure. Dr. McCann mentioned that he heard of a husband working late on his job partly because he didn't want to come home until his wife was asleep. He called his oldest child on the way home and asked if your mom is asleep and the child said no, so he kept riding around the neighborhood until she was asleep. I don't know if that was a true story or not, but it could have been. What I do know is that scripture says, "It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a contentious wife" (Prov. 21:9 NRSV).

Communication

Dr. McCann, in his interpretation of the third chapter of Genesis, has an interesting theory concerning Satan's tempting of Eve. He suggests that the serpent has been having conversations with Eve before chapter three, and where was Adam?

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, you shall not eat from any tree in the garden?" (Gen. 3:1 NRSV).

It seems like Adam left her uncovered. The communication between Satan and Eve was extensive and there was no response from Adam. McCann said, men talk to your wives or someone else will. Communication will also help us to understand each other and eliminate the stress that non-communication leaves to our own imagination.

Revering the Divine Order

McCann also said,

The scripture said that Adam was not deceived. Eve was the one who was deceived, but God called Adam in account and Adam placed the blame on the woman. Men are to nourish (feed) and cherish (protect) their wives. Eve was feeding Adam, which is reversing the divine order. It is clear that Adam had left his wife uncovered and the serpent had her full attention, therefore, deceived her and she took the forbidden fruit and ate some and is feeding her husband.⁵

McCann raised the question, “What are we (men) feeding our wives?” As priest of our homes, it is your responsibility to pray with and for your wife and children and lead them in devotion in the word of God. This also brings me back to our first question, which is biblical. Could the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships, as it relates to the black church, be the result of a broken covenant with God? There is a lot more to be said about this as we continue to deal with covenant theology. Marriage is a covenant that is made before God, each other, and a witness. Dr. McCann has already given us the divine order of the role men in the home as priest, protector, and provider. Now he has another trilogy that he calls the three A’s.

The 3 A’s that can be detrimental to marriage and relationships are absence, abuse, and adultery.

Absence: Absence in a relationship is not just because a person is away physically from the home even though that can be a factor. But you can be in the same house, and even sleep in the same bed and be absent. The comedian Robin Williams and his wife lived in a thirty-room mansion. He lived on one side and she lived on the other side and when he committed suicide, she had no idea he was dead for quite a while.

⁵ J. G. McCann on Genesis 3:6.

When we allow our lack of communication, resentment, unforgiveness, and going to bed angry without resolving our problems, it can cause absence.

Abuse: Abuse can come in many forms and it is to be avoided in marriage and relationship or the relationship can be damaged beyond repair. Putting your spouse down, being mean spirited, it has to be your way only, and the inability to reason with each other is abuse.

Adultery: Adultery will destroy any marriage. Adultery is not only a sin against the marriage covenant, but also a sin against God and His commandments (Exod. 5:18).

Mutual Submission

Not too long ago (June 2019), I was driving to Hampton, VA to attend the Hampton University's iconic annual Minister's Conference, when I heard a lady on the religious radio station I was listening to say that the Bible said, "that my husband has the right to rule over me and that I must submit to him." I then realized that I was listening to a Southern Baptist religious broadcast and had to consider that religious cultural tradition.

It comes from the same religious culture that supported segregation and taught that Black people were cursed and tried to use scripture out of context to justify their right to enslave us, mistreat us, and to uphold white supremacy. So, when Dr. McCann teaches us about mutual submission it is in the context of Christ's love for the church. (He gave Himself up for the church—us.)

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21 NRSV). So men love to speak about verses 22-24, but never want to acknowledge verses 25-28, Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church – and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. In the same way,

husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.⁶

In mutual submission, McCann teaches that there are things that the husband may be better at so that should be his contribution to the relationship. There are some things the wife is more proficient in so that would be her contribution. It could be cooking, cleaning, finances, planning for the future, etc.

The Law of Priority: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.” (Gen. 2:24 NRSV).

McCann gave us an analogy of the process on what it means to leave one covering to another. As we witness a traditional Christian wedding, let’s follow the procedures. The bridegroom is the first one out and stands on the left hand side of the officiating minister. After the wedding party marches down the aisle the bride is the last to come down and is joined by her father. The minister gives the charge to the bride and groom and then asks, who gives this woman to be wedded? The father speaks up and says, “I do.” Now watch this! (Dr. Johnnie McCann favorite words). The woman now has left the covering of her father and now is under the covering of her husband. Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. She now takes on the husband’s last name. Yes, there are some women who opt to keep their last names, but it is the culture of the world we live in, and it is antithetical to our Christian values and they don’t mind reversing the divine order, or the law of priority. Dr. McCann said, you show me a woman who refuses to take on the name of her husband and I will show you a woman who won’t submit and wants to be in control.

⁶ J. G. McCann on Ephesians 5:28.

It is also important that a woman knows what she is submitting to! What's the vision? Where are you leading me? Have a plan. When you agree to get married, the relationship changes. In order for the marriage to work you have to prioritize; instead of your mother and father your spouse must come first.

Be in agreement with one another. Be like the baseball umpires and don't be afraid to call a huddle in order to get something that's important right. It is better that two make the wrong decision than one make the decision. Make sure that every major purchase is what both of you agree on. Don't be separated under the same roof. What did Jesus say about marriage and divorce in Matthew 19:8? He said to them, "It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so." Today, in many cities, there are billboards advertising cheap divorces, but it can never show you the pain of what it does to the hearts and souls of those who are in a vortex of debris that will leave scarred tissue that may last literally for the rest of their lives. Divorce carries a much higher price than the financial aspect that the cheap advertisement boasts of, the price of deep emotional pain that money can't alleviate. We must do all we can to save our marriages. Love each other, kiss and make up. Forgive one other. Be kind and lovable. You can't kiss and fight at the same time.

God hates divorce because He knows what it does to us. "For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the Lord of host. So, take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless" (Mal. 2: 16 NRSV). Experts say that the biggest stressors in life are the death of a loved one, divorce and separation, and I can attest to that.

At the beginning of this seminar, we gave out a survey for the participants to answer on what they think about the decline in marriage and relationships in the black church and the results were somewhat disturbing. There is a belief that Black males lack the willingness to place their uninhabited trust in our Lord Jesus the Christ. We will explain the full results of the survey later on.

The survey does shed some light on covenant theology and the question that is raised in my challenge statement. I am concerned with the continuous decline of African American men in marriage and relationships in the black church. The question I proposed is “Could the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships, as it relates to the black church, be the result of a broken covenant with God?”

We must first establish what covenant theology is in order to answer the question. Dr. McCann has no doubt given us a host of theological insights on this aspect of study, but I want to shed some light on biblical covenants both in the Old Testament and New Testament. What is a covenant according to scripture? Literally, it is a contract. In the Bible, a covenant is an agreement between God and his people and usually requires certain conduct from them. There are different opinions on how many covenants are in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. I will give you five in the Old Testament, and one in the New Testament.

Covenant	Mediator	Sign	Bible Verse	Location
Adamic Covenant	Adam	Sabbath	Gen. 1-3	Mount Eden
Noahic Covenant	Noah	Rainbow	Gen. 6-9	Mount Ararat
Abrahamic Covenant	Abraham	Circumcision	Gen. 12,15,17,22	Mount Moriah
Mosaic Covenant	Moses	Ten Commandments	Exod. 20	Mount Sinai
Davidic Covenant	David	Temple of Solomon	2 Sam. 7:4-16	
Eucharistic Covenant	Jesus	Eucharist	Luke 22	Mount Calvary

New Covenant Theology is a Christian theological position teaching that the person and work of Jesus Christ is the central focus of the Bible. One distinctive result of this is that the Old Testament laws have been abrogated or cancelled with Jesus' crucifixion, and replaced with the law of Christ of the New Covenant. It shares similarities with, and yet is distinct from, dispensationalism and covenant theology. Thus, the New Covenant is a gracious covenant.

Those included in the covenant are reconciled to God by grace alone, apart from anything they do. Jesus purchased a people by his death on the cross so that all those for whom he died receive full forgiveness of sins and become incurable God-lovers by the Holy Spirit.⁷

Marriage is a Covenant. In Mat. 19: 4-6 NIV, Jesus quotes Gen. 2: 24

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “That at the beginning, the Creator made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. “Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

Dr. McCann already gave us an excellent analogy of this scripture that sums up the meaning of the role of both partners. He also stated, that God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16, NASB) “For I hate divorce,” says the Lord, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the Lord of hosts. “So, take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

Marriage like Christ and the Church: Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

⁷ *Reasonable Theology*, www.reasonabletheology.org (accessed July 31, 2019).

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body (Eph. 5: 22-30 NASB).

In verse 31, Paul repeats what the writer in Gen. 2: 24 and what Jesus quoted in Matt. 19:4,5, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

Once again, I refer back to the late Dr. Johnnie McCann and his exegetical and hermeneutical explanation of this scripture when he taught us (1) Reverencing the Divine Order, (2) The Law of Priority, and (3) Mutual Submission.

We are Not Perfect and the Fact is Due to our Sins We Separate and Divorce.

Like so many of us who promise to keep our marriage vows before God, the minister, and the many who came to witness the marriage covenant, my marriage with my first wife ended up in divorce after twenty-two active years and three years of separation. I was married at the young age of twenty and my parents had to sign for me in order for the marriage to take place in the City of New York. I thought I would be married for the rest of my life with her. The marriage produced two sons whom we both loved and cared for. The bottom line is that I soon found out how immature we both were and as the years went by, we refused to give in and let Christ control our married lives. I cannot tell you how much suffering we all had gone through because we wanted our own way.

After being single for about five years, I learned to love myself and to forgive myself for the way I treated my first wife. I looked to the Lord for directions in seeking a

wife that I could give my all, in love and commitment, in good times and difficult times. I remarried on October 14, 1995 to Terry R. Holomon and my life has been blessed beyond measure. This year marks our 25th anniversary. Whenever and wherever I preach, I always tell her to stand and then I say; “This is the best thing that ever happened to me other than Jesus, my wife Terry.” I have learned to love God more than anybody and everything because of His grace, mercy, unconditional love, forgiveness, protection and provision for me.

It brings me back to Dr. McCann’s teaching on the triangle and how it is more important that we move toward God in our relationships first and foremost. God is our first love and as we move from the earthly toward God in heaven, we will automatically grow closer to each other.

The question that I raised was: “Could the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships, as it relates to the Black Church, be the result of a broken covenant with God?” Let’s look at my questions in full before I go any farther in my research to the question.

Why is there a continuous decline of African American men as it relates to marriage and relationships with black women? The black church has had a continuous decline in marriage for quite some time. Is marriage still honorable according to the First and Second Testament Scriptures?

Why is it so difficult for African American men to commit to sustainable relationships with our women? Can the black church really be healthy without strong committed relationships between black men and women? What will happen if nothing is done to help to turn the tide?

These are the questions I wrestled with as the burden lay heavily on my heart and spirit to change these negatives into a positive through this demonstration project in my church. Thus, my title emerged: “The Shift from a Decline to Stabilization as It Relates to African American Men in Marriage and Relationships in the Black Church.”

Before I convey to you our positive results, due to the late Dr. Johnnie McCann’s seminar, I will answer the question: “Could the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships, as it relates to the black church, be the result of a broken covenant with God?”

Dr. McCann, in his teaching on what he calls the “3 Ps,” can also suggest that the decline of African American men may well be the result of a broken covenant with their Creator. He said men should be (1) priests in their homes, (2) protectors, and (3) providers. Obviously, if they are not in their homes to carry out that responsibility, then we have to assume that something is amiss.

When we talk about the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships in the black church, then we must have had at some time a substantial amount of men in marriages and relationships in the black church. So, when did this decline begin? Or when did we start to feel and notice the effect of it in the church or our homes and communities?

In a time when the American family has undergone dramatic evolution, change among African Americans has been particularly rapid and acute. African Americans now marry later than any other major ethnic group, and while in earlier decades nearly 92 percent of black women eventually married, today 30 percent are expected to remain single.

The black divorce rate has increased nearly five-fold over the last thirty years, and is double the rate of the general population.⁸

The result, according to *The Decline in Marriage among African Americans*, is a greater share of family responsibilities being borne by women, an increased vulnerability to poverty and violence, and an erosion of community ties.⁹

Black women belong to the most unmarried group of people in our nation. Nearly seven out of every ten black women are unmarried, and as many as three out of ten may never marry. For black women, being unmarried has become the new normal, single, and the new black.

It wasn't always so. Through the middle of the twentieth century, approximately nine out of ten black women married. Now, black women are about half as likely to be married as their 1950s counterparts. Marriage has also declined among black men, fewer than half of who are husbands. Children are the most impressionable witnesses to the fracturing of black intimacy. As a fifteen-year-old African American girl in Massachusetts explains, "I don't know anyone who's married, or anyone (has) stayed married."¹⁰

Most of our resource data from bibliographies suggest that marriages and relationships of African Americans were solid up until the 1960s or perhaps the early 1970s. With that being said, maybe the statement of Robert Woodson, founder and President of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise on the decline of African American marriages had some veracity.

However, not everyone agreed that economics and other external circumstances could completely explain diminishing marriage rates. Between 1865 and 1965, despite the fact that we endured slavery, Jim Crow, discrimination, ten years of Depression, no representation in government, the Ku Klux Klan, and no police protection, black marriages

⁸ M. Belinda Tucker and Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, ed., *The Decline in Marriage Among African Americans* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1995).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ralph Richard Banks, *Is Marriage for White People? How the African American Marriage Decline Affects Everyone* (New York: Penguin Group, 2011).

flourished. Don't tell me external circumstances were responsible for altering that.¹¹

Although Robert Woodson did not say what the problem was that contributed to the decline in marriages of African Americans, he did infer that external circumstances were not responsible for this dilemma. The question(s) that I raised is theological: "Could the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships, as it relates to the black church, be the result of a broken covenant with God?" I am inclined to think that Robert Woodson is thinking that the problem is theological (spiritual). The late Dr. McCann's teachings are from the spiritual aspect of men and women who should be in covenant relationship with their Creator who cares and loves them, with the practical (behavior) emphasis on what is expected from each other to please Him and each other.

I believe that African American men have broken their covenant with God and that has contributed to the decline in marriages. We African Americans, have a history of going to church and worshiping God and calling on the name of Jesus to save us, deliver us, and to set us free from sin and bondage. The church was where God was, the only One who could help us get through the difficulties we faced in the world and in our families. If it were not for the church during our struggles with Jim Crow, especially in the south, we would still be under the oppressive caste system.

Every major crisis that African Americans have encountered in this country, from slavery, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow, to the liberation of the Civil Rights Movement

¹¹ Brookings Institution, "Event Summary: Marriage Movement and the Black Church," *Brookings*, June 2, 2004, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/event-summary-marriage-movement-and-the-black-church/> (accessed April 8, 2018).

under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., had a strong theological foundation.

Most of the mass meetings of the Civil Rights Movement were in churches. The meetings began with prayer and ended with prayer. The marches, for the most part, began with prayer and continued in such songs of freedom as, “Not Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around” and “We Shall Overcome.”

As I look back, I can see that the civil rights movement was rooted in the family. There were men, women, and children being humiliated, attacked, and thrown in jail for the cause of freedom. The common bond was that men were in relationship with the God of our salvation through Jesus the Christ and that is the essence of covenant relationship.

In the context of this question, “Could the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships, as it relates to the black church, be the result of a broken covenant with God?” there are three primary points I want to be clear on: 1) theology (God), 2) church, and 3) family. There was a time in our culture (like many others) when men were responsible for providing food, shelter, protection, and direction for their family. Most of the men back then had some religious belief and values so that marriages stayed together in the hardest and most difficult times. Dr. McCann spoke very candidly about men and their roles as priests, protectors, and providers. He also said men should be, “Lovers and Leaders,” but sadly too many men have become “Lovers and Leavers.”

It was in the mid-1970s that Alex Haley’s story “Roots” aired on primetime television. What touched me at the beginning of the story, before the slave traders captured Kunta Kinte, was the scene where his father takes him out in the night by the moonlight, minutes after his mother gave birth to him. The father dedicates him to God

(Allah) and holds him up and says, “There’s nothing greater than you,” and whispers in his ear three times followed by raising him toward the heavens. How important it is for a man, a father, to be the spiritual leader in his home as well as provider and protector.

The church used to be a place where people of African American heritage could unload their heavy burdens upon the altar of prayer in what we call intercessory prayer. They came to pray for the family and they were not ashamed to call out the name of a wayward husband, wife, child, mother, father, sister, or brother. The songs that were sung were about a God who brought them through trouble and pain and provided shelter during the storm, put food on the table and a roof over their head. God kept the family together when Satan tried to tear them apart. Some of their concerns and issues related to a husband drunk at home from his Saturday night drinking binge, a son hanging out with the wrong crowd, and a pregnant teenage daughter. They asked, “Church, will you pray for us?” and sang the song “The Lord Will Make a Way Somehow.”

The pastor would preach a sermon that urged us to trust in God and believe that He loves us and that He cares about us and will help us find a way through our trouble. Furthermore, the sermon was about change, and forgiveness, and repentance for our sins, and turning to Jesus and receiving Him as Lord and Savior.

The church was a stabilizing force in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and perhaps the early 1970s. The divorce rate during those years was much lower among church people than those not in church, and it was less common than it is now for African Americans to

live together outside of marriage. The divorce rate in the church is now just as high as non-church people.¹²

Yes, I believe that black men in particular have broken their covenant with God. Therefore, he abrogated his responsibility as a husband and in many cases a father to his children. The problem here is that we believe the Bible, the word of God, and that marriage is honorable in God's sight. From what I believe from the Scripture, God has always blessed marriage and the family and set in order the responsibilities of husbands, wives and children.

The late Dr. Johnnie McCann taught us that we must reverence the divine order and too many African American men (and women) are out of order because they have broken their covenant with God. "For my people have done two evil things: They have abandoned me – the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all" (Jer. 2:13 NLT)!

By the 1960s or 1970s, African Americans everywhere in the South could vote. Desegregation of schools was on the rise as was the impact of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). African Americans were voted into office in some key cities in the North and the South, and in the mid-1980s, Douglas Wilder, an African American, became the Governor of Virginia. It appeared as things got better politically and African Americans began to prosper, the church became less meaningful and material goods seemed to replace spirituality for them.

¹² Don Moore, "African-Americans and Marriage," <http://www.divorce360.com/divorce-articles/news/trends/african-americans-and-marriage.aspx?artid=1176> (accessed November 7, 2019).

The third stanza of what was called the “Negro National Anthem” written by James Weldon Johnson, “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” may ring true to African American men in particular as a warning when we forget our covenant with God.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might,
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.

So, I reflect back on what Robert Woodson said,

Don’t tell me external circumstances were responsible for altering that. Yes, there are other issues that are sociological, racial, and economical, from the biblical aspect of our history we have to admit that our cry out for God in our pain and misery from slavery, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement that God heard our cry and delivered us from our oppressors.¹³

We also have to admit before God that many of us have become complacent and compromised our covenant with our creator as we began to ease up on our spiritual lives and left churchgoing to our women and children.

Is the Decline of African American Men in Marriages and Relationships Exaggerated?

I promised you earlier that I would share with you the results of a survey that our participants engaged in. Let me give you the fifteen questions on the survey.

¹³ Brookings Institution, “Event Summary: Marriage Movement and the Black Church.”

- 1) Are you currently in a relationship? If yes, a) Do you feel your partner is committed to you? b) Are you fully committed to your partner? If no, c) Do you want to be in a committed relationship? d) Do you believe you can be committed to one person?
- 2) Do you attend church regularly?
- 3) Do you believe in marriage/committed relationships?
- 4) Do you believe that the black church has a place in today's society?
- 5) Do you believe God should play a significant role in your relationship?
- 6) Does your faith play a significant part in your individual life today?
- 7) What is the reason for the decline of the black church? (Please respond to A through G based on your opinion.): a) Lack of covenant understanding? b) Lack of marriage and committed relationships? c) Anger issues? d) Lack of familiar relationships? e) Children out of wedlock? f) Societal influence? g) Other deeply rooted causes?
- 8) Is it difficult to forgive your partner? If so, why? (Please respond to A through G based on your opinion: a) Lack of relational understanding? b) Afraid to appear weak? c) Lack of reconciliation methods? d) Always focused on "I" and not "we"? e) The pain is too deep? f) Don't know how to be friends? g) Other complicated reasons?
- 9) Is it difficult to forgive your church if they have wronged you or hurt you?
- 10) In your opinion, does society see Black Males as leaders?
- 11) Do you view Black Males as head of their households?
- 12) Are Black Males reluctant to place their full trust in God?

13) In your own words, what are signs of a healthy marriage/relationship?

14) In your own words, what are the signs of a healthy church?

15) In your own words, what do you hope to gain from this seminar?

These were the questions that were given to all of the participants in the seminar before the start of teaching of the late Rev. Dr. Johnnie McCann. The results of this survey are somewhat disturbing because it still cast African American men in a negative state as being accepted as real leaders in society as well as among his own people, and what seems to be a lack of concern for God and the church.

Now, let me share with you the results of this seminar, so you can perhaps see where my concern for the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships in the black church.

The survey with fifteen questions was handed out to participants during the Marriage and Committed Relationships in the Black Church seminar on Friday, March 22, 2019. From the survey responses submitted, nineteen were completed in full. The results of the nineteen complete surveys offered the following results, 1) 100% of the participants believe in marriage; 2) Approximately 79% (15 yes and 4 no) attend church regularly; and 3) Approximately 63% (12 yes and 7 no) are currently in committed relationships.

An analysis of results indicates that African Americans believe in the sanctification of covenantal marriage and feel the church should play a major part in their spiritual relationships. However, this belief is not translating into satisfying earthly relationships.

Looking further into the survey results, it seems society, familial relationships, children and anger issues have some influence on the participants' perception of the black church and committed relationships. In addition, the survey results also portray weaknesses in the view of the African American male because society fails to see them as relevant leaders of their communities and heads of their households.

Therefore, there is a belief that Black males lack the willingness to place their full trust in our Lord Jesus Christ. For true relationships to be forged among two people and then spread into the black church, there must be trust, love, open communication and commitment for a healthy relationship and for the church to strive and stay alive. The participants believe these relationships can be achieved, but there needs to be congregants and partners that are fully willing to be committed to each other, and more importantly to God.

The result of the seminar is where we can measure its positive outcome and not only the results of the survey alone. The teachings of the late Dr. Johnnie McCann proved to be invaluable. Our feedback from the participants has been positive for those in a relationship and those who are seeking sustainable relationships. As I stated in "Introduction to the Setting," my church has not had an official marriage ministry and this seminar has participants inquiring about an ongoing marriage and relationship ministry in my church.

Dr. McCann's teaching has blessed so many of our participants that a cry for more knowledge of the biblical aspect on marriage and relationships should be done on a quarterly basis. I have had three couples approach me and say, "Pastor Harris, we must

have a marriage ministry in our church, and we volunteer our services because our marriage has been blessed through this seminar.”

I also had a man who was married in our church about three years ago say that he and his wife were going to approach the Senior Pastor concerning marriage ministry and counseling because there is a great need for it. One official in our church who was a participant said this is the kind of teaching we need in our church on marriage and relationships that can help us greatly, and we must move to establish it now. I want to help in any way I can.

One young lady registered along with her husband (who seldom attends church) because they were having marital problems and wanted to find a way to save their marriage. I was approached by the couple after the last of the goals of this Demonstration Project was completed (The Preached Word) to see if I would consider giving them further personal marriage counseling. I am happy to say that I not only agreed, but I am in the last of the five week session with the couple and their marriage now has a better chance of surviving because of the teaching of the late Dr. Johnnie McCann and his passion to help build positive and sustainable relationships through the Word of God.

In my challenge statement I said that this demonstration project will find ways to build positive relationships and strong marriages, thereby strengthening the church through seminars, educational workshops and the preached word. From the feedback that has been received to this point, our participants have benefited from the challenge that has been carried out in this seminar.

The married couples that were participants in this seminar insist that we must have a marriage and relationship ministry in our church. The couple that I am counseling

had never had pre-marriage counseling and was married by a civil official in a ceremony at City Hall.

There is an acronym “FACES” but I can’t recall who formed it that fits the couple (and I believe many others) I am counseling now due to the seminar.

- 1) F - Family background: The knowledge of the background of a future spouse is imperative and this should be considered before marriage.
- 2) A – Attitude: The dating process is the time to be alert at the mannerism, disposition, and feelings of how your future mate will react in challenging times both negative and positive.
- 3) C – Compatible: Are you compatible culturally, in your faith and religion? Family values?
- 4) E – Equal: Do you look at each other as equal, or does hierarchy and role-playing has any part in your relationship?
- 5) S – Skills: What skills do you bring to the relationship? Academic or vocational? What is your contribution that will help build a strong relationship?

You know people by their “FACES,” and you are the average of the five people you spend the most time with. What do they have you doing? thinking? talking? feeling and saying?

Wrong relationships? You are better off alone. Almost everything that the acronym FACES stands for I have observed in the couple that I am in counseling with. The marriage still has a chance to survive and potentially thrive because they are both willing to work hard to make their marriage better.

Now that we have experienced the dynamic teaching of the late Dr. Johnnie McCann, and can see how many people have been helped by this seminar, our church has been strengthened because of stronger and more committed relationships being established in our congregation.

We know that our church has to do is to create a marriage relationship ministry that includes pre-marriage counseling, marriage counseling, and marriage enrichment workshops that will help those who are seeking sustainable relationships while on quarterly or semiannual marriage retreats.

Our church has helped turn the tide through the participants of the seminar: “The Shift from a Decline to Stabilization as it Relates to African American Men in Marriage and Relationships in the Black Church.” Yes, this seminar has made a difference not only in the participants, but also in our church as to what it will take to continue to address the issue of the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships.

This is some of what was said by Diann Dawson, who directs the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) Office of Regional Operators, that churches were the best positioned to promote marriage.

The marriage movement in America will never be fully realized until we have the full participation and commitment of the black church. The black church is the strongest institution in our community, and the African – American Healthy Marriage Initiative realizes the importance in partnering with the black church to successfully reach the black community on the benefits of marriage.¹⁴

Ronald Mincy, a professor of Social Work Policy and Practice at Columbia University, urged panelists to be realistic about the ability of churches to reach those

¹⁴ Ibid.

most in need of relationship counseling. Given the low church attendance seen in many congregations across the country, Mincy said, “The church is only effective to the extent that it has an effective outreach to African American men so that they’re there to hear from the pulpit when it speaks out on these issues.”¹⁵

W. Bradford Wilcox, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, also presented evidence indicating that only three percent of black churches had designed marriage ministries.¹⁶

As I had earlier stated in the introduction, our church has never had a marriage ministry, although we have over forty other ministries. When this project concerning the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships in the black church came to mind, establishing an ongoing church ministry on marriage was not in the forefront. But now that has changed, and I will look to build a marriage ministry in our church with the support of the Senior Pastor and some of my site team and participants who have already expressed their support.

What has emerged out of the seminar by the late Dr. Johnnie McCann are a group of participants and site team members who have expressed that we have not only been challenged to be the best soulmates to our partners, but to help our church in an ongoing marriage and relationship ministry that will turn the tide of a decline of African American men in marriage and relationships to stabilization.

So, this Demonstration Project has reached its goals, and has found ways to build positive relationships and strong marriages. This is based on the feedback from the

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

participants not only through the evaluation, but their personal testimony of how they were helped and their saying that they wanted an ongoing marriage ministry.

The aftermath of this seminar has already proven to be helpful to a marriage that was in jeopardy of separation that might have led to divorce. They are now in their fifth week of marriage counseling.

Our church will no doubt be stronger because a marriage ministry will help those who are struggling in their marriages and relationships. The example is this couple who attended our seminar and found out that we are here to help them in their relationship and that they can make it if they are willing to work on their marriage through counseling.

The site team, the late Dr. Johnnie McCann, and I have tried to do our best in dealing with covenant theology from a biblical perspective. The question is “Could the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships, as it relates to the black church, be the result of a broken covenant with God?” The seminar has addressed the question and the readers can draw their own thoughts and opinions as to its effectiveness.

Words cannot express my gratitude to the Most High God for leading me to ask the late Rev. Dr. Johnnie G. McCann Sr., to be our facilitator. My friend and brother was a blessing to the whole body of Christ. He made everyone feel loved and spoke words that were uplifting, whether it was in his role as Senior Pastor of the St. Luke’s Baptist Church in Harlem, or on the faculty of Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, or 1st Vice President of the Baptist Minister’ Conference of Greater New York and Vicinity, he carried himself as a servant of God with grace and dignity.

I have been in mourning ever since his sudden death. I have a flash drive on my computer that has not only the seminar, but also the Educational Workshop that Dr.

McCann facilitated, I have to watch and listen to the recording as he teaches so that I can write this dissertation accurately, and I can't tell you how often my eyes have filled with tears.

We will hear a lot more about Dr. Johnnie McCann as I begin to write about the Educational Workshop. I will use this situation to honor my friend by doing my best to not only write a dissertation that reflects his love and passion for the marriage and relationship seminars and workshops that he facilitates all around the country and Jamaica West Indies, but to live to love God and His people.

CHAPTER 3 FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

How does the theory of forgiveness leading to reconciliation apply to marriage and relationships? What theological voices can empower married couples to recognize the covenantal underpinnings of their relationships?

On April 26, 2019, an Educational Workshop, led by Dr. Johnnie McCann dealt with the practical theological aspect. Dr. McCann reminds us that he refers to the “Workshop” as “Word-shop” because his teachings are based upon the word of God. Marriages and relationships that are Christ-centered can better withstand the storms that will come in our marriages and relationships. However, even the best relationships will require, at some point, forgiveness and maybe reconciliation.

Profound Lessons from the Mighty Sequoia Tree

Dr. McCann taught and demonstrated to us the nature of the sequoia tree. The sequoia tree can grow to more than 350 feet tall with its trunk having a circumference of 113 feet. You would think that its roots are deep, but they are only about five or six feet deep. The mighty tree towers hundreds of feet up in the air but can withstand intense environmental pressure.

Lightning can strike them, fierce winds can blow them, and forest fires can rage around them; but the mighty sequoia endures, stands firm, only growing stronger through the trials.

One of the secrets to the strength of this giant tree is what goes on below the surface. The roots of the sequoia tree can run over a hundred feet long, reaching out to other sequoia trees and interlocking with their roots. Each sequoia tree becomes empowered and reinforced by the strength of the others. They may lean on each other but they will withstand the winds and will not fall.

The secret of the mighty sequoia trees is also a key to maintaining a strong, healthy marriage. Couples that face problems alone are more likely to fall apart during tough times. However, the ones who interlock their lives in a network of other strong marriages increase their chances of surviving the fierce storms of life. Keep the passion in your marriage, love God, and do marriage the biblical way. Biblical principles are being challenged by the culture, but the culture always seems to look for a shortcut out of marriages and relationships, such as no strings attached relationships, claiming irreconcilable differences and seeking cheap divorces, with no thought of the spiritual and emotional consequences.

Here is the key point that we glean from the mighty sequoia tree to solidify the bonds of your marriage in the light of Matthew 7: 25: “and the rain fell, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall for it had been founded on the rock.”

It is crucial that a husband and wife pursue godly advice, healthy friendships, and experienced mentors. A mentor is not necessarily trying to be your friend but someone who can give you constructive criticism. They can make a world of difference in your marriage. “By pride comes nothing but strife, But with the well-advised is wisdom” (Prov. 13:10 NKJV).

Dr. McCann's analogy of the mighty sequoia tree really helps us to understand what it means to cling to each other despite the fierce winds, environmental pressures, and the raging forest fires around us. We can still stand firm, if we lean on the Word of God. (Dr. McCann demonstrates to us the strength of the sequoia tree's roots connecting to each other by having four couples interlock arms and lean to the side as far as they can lean. Not one couple fell because their arms were locked together.)

A Good Marriage Entails Hard Work

Dr. McCann admits that a good marriage entails hard work. How do you keep the passion and freshness? Marriage was created by God for our success and built upon His word. There must be balance in marriage. Eph. 5:22-25 gives us a portrait of marriage likened to Christ and the church. Another key scripture is Genesis 2:24 (KJV):

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

In this passage, the word cleave means to pursue with all your energy. According to God's plan, marriage takes energy. You have to work at it! Men are visual (I like what I see); women are emotional (I need to sense that you care). Most couples start out pursuing one another tenaciously. When you first pursued your mate, you did so with all your heart but once you were together the pursuit stopped. What happened? We begin to take one another for granted. That's human nature. That's why marriages encounter trouble because we stop working at it.

A marriage can be great as long as the husband and wife are pouring their energy into it. In the words of a relationship coach:

True Love Isn't Found, It's Built: Life Mastery: True love isn't found. Rather, it's built. A strong romantic relationship is a labor of love. My fiancée, Tatiana and I have such a strong relationship because we invest in

each other on a daily basis. The most successful couples stay together because they put effort and energy into the relationship.¹⁷

John Gottman's research shows that every time you follow through on your agreements, share affection and appreciation, and create positive future plans with your partner you are making small investments in what he calls, your "emotional bank account."¹⁸

True love is a commitment between two people. Falling in love with someone is easy. However, staying in love is another story altogether. In the beginning stages of a romantic relationship, it's natural to experience the high that comes with new love. Everything feels exciting. Naturally, nobody wants this high to end. As a result, the majority of intimate couples go to great lengths to avoid conflict of any kind.

As contrary as this may sound, this false sense of hope for everlasting security, positivity, and happiness is actually what leads to the dissolution of a lot of romantic relationships. Don't get me wrong, it doesn't feel good to "rock the boat" when romance and passion are in your front brain.

However, if you and your partner don't do the work to develop healthy relationship skills while you are courting one another, you will encounter a lot of challenges down the road. Getting too comfortable in a relationship too fast isn't a good thing. This is when couples start taking each other for granted and stop putting effort into the relationship.¹⁹

Once again, the McCann is on point and this article supports what he has been teaching concerning the hard work that must be put into a good relationship. The problem is that we don't want to work at love – we want to believe that true love is easy – and many of us enter marriage with this misconception.

¹⁷ Stefan James, "Relationship Advice: 7 Principles to Make Your Relationship Work," *Project Life Mastery*, <https://projectlifemastery.com/relationship-advice-for-couples/> (accessed November 7, 2019).

¹⁸ John M. Gottman and Joan DeClaire, *The Relationship Cure: A 5 Step Guide to Strengthening your Marriage, Family and Friendships* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001).

¹⁹ James, "Relationship Advice."

The first misconception is that if we marry the right person, loving emotions will occur effortlessly throughout our marriage, but soul mates are not born – they are made. The best marriages are made when two people roll up their sleeves and endure hard times while working through their incompatibilities together. (Someone said: “even if a marriage is made in heaven, it has to be consummated on earth.”)

McCann said no one comes to a marriage with a full deck...and some cards are not on the table. There are some cards that you need to turnover now. If you are not a handy man, let her know. And if you can't cook, let him know. If one is more gifted in finances, shopping, cooking or planning, then that person should take the lead in that particular area. Sometimes we can see strengths in certain areas in our mates and completely ignore the negatives until it explodes on our bad day.

Secret bank accounts, mail going to your relative's house, a get-away plan, hiding your raise or salary is deceitful and can explode on your marriage. When we have messed up in our marriage, we need to “face it, trace it, and grace it.” If you learned from your mistakes and endeavor to show your mate that you mean business, forgiveness and reconciliation is the process that will allow your marriage to grow.

You Can Solve Relationship Problems Without Breaking Up.

Breakups in relationships can be avoided if we learn the ability to accept and admit when we are wrong and apologize. Instead, what we often do is let our egos get in our way. We point the finger and blame each other. We don't accept responsibility for the things we've done wrong, and we try to find an angle to make it the other person's fault.

Most of the time couples get past these arguments in short term, but the anger of unresolved problems can linger. This leads to future arguments where the personal goal of WINNING is more important than resolving the dispute fairly. Eventually, the

relationship becomes too stressful, and one or both partners decide it is time to end the relationship.

Recent Experience and a Counseling Session with a Married Couple

It is because of this project and the teachings of the late Dr. Johnnie McCann that I am counseling a couple. The title of this demonstration project is: “The Shift from Decline to Stabilization as it Relates to African American Men in Marriage and Relationships in the Black Church.” Once again, I am reminded of the effects of this project to the participants involved in building positive relationships and strong marriages; thereby, strengthening the black church through seminars, educational workshops and the preached word.

The Site Team agrees that the best evaluation is the progress of the participants in their relationships due to a better understanding of how strong relationships are built and their willingness to work hard at it.

The married couple that I am counseling, due to this demonstration project, have been struggling in their marriage and are finding out now that a good marriage takes two people who are willing to put in some hard work. On their third counseling session, they came into my office very agitated and it came to a point where they resorted to verbally attacking each other’s personhood.

After a minute or so passed by, I asked them to sit down and take a few minutes to calm down. The atmosphere between them was chilling, but I must admit I felt calm and confident that we would get through this session and something positive would emerge out of the session. I began to pray for the couple and to thank God that they were here despite what had transpired. The opportunity that I had in that prayer was to remind them that they were willing to work at their marriage and that work entailed dealing with

the past and present so they can learn how to deal with each other in love for a better future.

The counseling session lasted about an hour. The tension slowly dissipated and I was able to give them the homework for the next session that would take place upon the completion of the assignment. The assignment that I gave them was to read one of the books of the late Dr. Johnnie McCann titled, *Marriage is No Joke*. The homework was not a surprise to the couple because I told them about it in our first session. The following is an excerpt from the book:

How to move from a worst to first desired marriage.

Stand C.L.E.A.R.

“Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess. 5:22)

C- Communicate daily with your spouse. Why? Lack of communication breeds separation. When you do communicate, make sure it’s clear communication. Make sure such communication is in the spirit of love and gentleness. Be sure that you communicate even more if you are out of town. If you sense that you are getting weak, run for cover. God and your mate are your covering.

L- Let God and your mate help you. Listen to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will warn you when you are treading on dangerous grounds. The more scriptures you commit to memory, the more you will have in your spiritual arsenal inventory to fight the darts, which are always designed to weaken you.

E- Eliminate all connections to previous current or future relationships that threaten the oneness of your marriage. In regard to those cases that present “baby mama drama”, keep your mate 100% abreast of what is going on. Take such matters extremely seriously.

A- Allow your mate total access to passwords, Facebook accounts, cell phones, email addresses, etc. Beloved, give no place to the adversary.

R- Report any contacts, texts, emails or sexual advancements made toward you or that you see coming in the direction of your mate.²⁰

²⁰ J. G. McCann Sr., *Marriage Is No Joke* (New York: JGM Ministries, 2002).

In my counseling of this couple, some of the very things that the late Dr. Johnnie McCann made reference to were some of their issues. The Rev. Dr. Johnnie McCann had put emphasis on the word of God as the foundation to help African American men to stay faithful in their marriages and relationships, thereby, strengthening the black church. He said that God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16 NRSV). That brings us to our forgiveness and reconciliation.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

How does the theory of forgiveness leading to reconciliation apply to marriage and relationships? What theological voices can empower married couples to recognize the covenantal underpinnings of their relationship?

Let's consider what the late Dr. Johnnie McCann has already touched on. The Bible commands that we must always forgive people their wrongs against us no matter how great the offense. We have all sinned against God more than others have sinned against us, and since God offers his forgiveness regardless of our offenses, he expects us to do the same (Matt. 18: 21-35).

This principle applies to marriage as well. Jesus declared that if you don't forgive others, then you block your own way to be forgiven. When the Pharisees came testing him on the legality of divorce, Jesus said:

“Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So, they are no longer two, but one flesh’? What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matt. 19:1-6).

When they (the Pharisees) said to him that Moses allowed a certificate of divorce and to put her away, Jesus said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your heart, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.” (Matt. 19:7-

8) The theory of forgiveness is really a biblical principle and certainly applies to marriage and relationships; and we need to take it seriously.

What theological voices can empower married couples to recognize the covenantal underpinnings of their relationships? The first and foremost voice to empower married couples concerning their covenantal relationship to each other is Jesus Christ who is Lord and Savior to all of us who have committed our lives to Him. He is also the head of His church and we are His body.

The next theological voice that describes married couples in covenantal relationship is the love of Christ for the church. The apostle Paul is one of the theological voices that Dr. McCann so often referred to in what marriages and relationship should model.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all of her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless (Ephesian 5:25-27 NASB).

The Bible says Forgiveness and Reconciliation are Connected but Are Not the Same

You can forgive people who have hurt you deeply but sometimes it is not always possible or right to reconcile with abusive, hurtful, or unrepentant people. The Bible says forgiveness is a choice one individual can make without the consent of another. The Bible also says, however, that reconciliation needs two parties to both agree on forgiveness and restoration of the relationship. “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” (Amos 3:3 NIV).

According to the Bible, you can have forgiveness without reconciliation. However, you cannot have reconciliation without forgiveness. Not only are they

different, but it is sometimes unwise to continue to promote more sin and abuse when full reconciliation is granted in unbiblical ways.

One reason forgiving those who continue to assault us is often resisted is because forgiveness is confused with reconciliation. Does God call us to rejoin a relationship that would only continue in abuse? Are we called to endlessly subject ourselves to hurtful treatment or else not be considered a Christian? Questions like these occur when forgiveness and reconciliation are confused. God always calls every Christian to forgive others, but God does not call us to always be reconciled.

Forgiveness can be done in your heart between you and God. Reconciliation must involve the willful choice of two people or parties. Additionally, it is against scripture to reconcile with people who claim to be Christians and yet refuse to repent in actions of the sin you have pointed out to them. When people are retaliatory, threatening, a risk to others, or someone is consistently living in a way contrary to the scriptures; it is your biblical obligation to forgive while not reconciling.²¹

I concur with the writer's analogy of the theory of forgiveness leading to reconciliation. Also, I am aware of the importance of pastors who give biblical truths in their counsel to those seeking marital counseling to be aware of the municipal and state laws concerning what constitutes professional counseling and pastoral counseling so they will not put themselves or the church in jeopardy of a lawsuit.

What used to be acceptable for pastors of churches years ago may no longer be acceptable today, so pastors must be careful of the counsel they give to their parishioners.

²¹ Shane Pruitt, "Understanding the Difference between Forgiveness and Reconciliation Can Change your Life," May 20, 2019, <http://www.shanepruitt.com/understanding-the-difference-between-forgiveness-and-reconciliation-could-change-your-life/> (accessed November 5, 2019).

What might have been acceptable years ago can get one in legal trouble today. For this reason, let me now tell you about the situation that happened in a church that I was a member of in my youth in relation to forgiveness and reconciliation.

Back in the late 1960s, my church experienced a tragedy among our membership. A woman who served as the church's organist was killed by her husband on a Sunday afternoon when she returned home from church. I knew her teenage children very well. Their father had a history of domestic violence. Our pastor always advocated for married couples to stay together and was against divorce. The pastor was aware of her situation but insisted that God would change her husband if she would just be faithful to him as a Christian.

Needless to say, that kind of advice today could lead to a lawsuit against the church and the pastor. While forgiveness is in order as Christians, reconciliation may not be possible if there is no change for the better in the heart and conduct of the person forgiven.

Can Pastor Counselors Be Prosecuted for Malpractice?

It is not uncommon for congregants to seek counseling from their ministers. Whether described as marriage counseling, family counseling, or spiritual counseling, many congregants seek advice and guidance from clergy members to deal with problems they and their loved ones are experiencing.

In providing these counseling services, clergy members enjoy certain legal protection, in part because of the first Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, but the protection is not absolute. In addition, potential liability varies from state to state. Consequently, there are some best practices in which clergy should engage.

States typically impose education prerequisites on professional counselors, require licensing, and set standards of care. The clergy are not altogether protected and they can be liable to lawsuits.²²

Requirements to Become a Christian Marriage Counselor

There are legal and educational requirements before one may qualify as a marriage counselor. The basic requirements to become a Christian Marriage Counselor are relatively straightforward, although there are a number of different qualifications that must be met to become certified. The following information assumes that you're planning on becoming a licensed marriage counselor who combines training with religion rather than a minister who does some counseling as part of being a church leader.

The qualifications for the latter are much more relaxed; any pastor can provide marriage counseling to members of the church congregation. To become a professional Christian Marriage Counselor, one needs all the following requirements:

- Have a Strong Faith
- Earn a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology or a Related Field
- Earn a Master's Degree in Counseling
- Complete at least Two Years in Supervised Clinical Training
- Get Certified²³

²² Anthony Ashton, "Can Pastor Counselors be Prosecuted for Malpractice?," October 12, 2015, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/can-pastor-counselors-be-prosecuted-for-malpractice.html> (accessed November 7, 2019).

²³ Study.com, "Become a Christian Counselor: Education and Career Roadmap," https://study.com/articles/Become_a_Christian_Counselor_Education_and_Career_Roadmap.html (accessed November 7, 2019).

Thom Rainer, a well-known leader in growing healthy churches, conducted a social media poll to a blog audience that included a nice mix of pastors, church staff, and church members. He asked pastors to share aspects of pastoral ministry that they enjoyed the most. Counseling was listed last, and these were the reasons cited:

1. **Not qualified.** In many ways, this response overlaps some of the others. The pastors told us they have not been trained in counseling. They told us they were not equipped to counsel. They told us they felt totally out of their element when they counseled others.
2. **Concerned about liabilities.** Many of the respondents were transparent about their concerns. Some are not certain what they are required legally to report as a consequence of a counseling session. Others feared lawsuits as a result of counseling. Still others wondered about confidentiality issues and counseling.
3. **Not fruitful.** A number of these pastors did not see their counseling sessions as fruitful. They did not know if they were helping, hindering, or hurting. They did not know how to evaluate the effectiveness of their counseling. Some wondered with transparency if they were wasting their time.
4. **Time Consuming.** Most pastors are overworked. Their workweek can be 60 or 70 hours longer. They are on call 24/7. When they look for places to find margin, it is not uncommon to see them choose to reduce or eliminate their counseling hours.
5. **Fearful of Blame.** A noticeable number of pastors told us that most-needy church members are most likely to seek counseling. Those same people are also likely to assign blame to the pastor if the counseling session does not meet their expectations.
6. **Availability of referrals.** Most churches and church leaders know someone who is a counselor by profession. That man or woman, in their opinion, is much more qualified to counsel others, so the pastors refer their counseling request to them.

7. **Opposite gender.** This problem has become even more exacerbated by the #Me-too movement. Understandably, pastors are becoming more and more hesitant to counsel people of opposite gender.²⁴

The late Rev. Dr. Johnnie McCann was very much aware of the tedious work of the clergy and the risk involved in counseling, so he not only prepared himself in ministry, but was willing to take it a step further because of the critical state of marriages and relationships in the black church.

This is why he did not hesitate to agree to help me in my doctoral project that was based on the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships in the black church. The fact is that the African American church has to step up and find ways to turn the tide when it comes to marriage and relationships in our churches so that our church can be strong in its witness for Jesus the Christ who is the head of the church. (Eph. 5:22-33)

For the last ten years, I have applied myself to the study of God's word in seminary. By God's grace I earned a degree in "Black Church Studies" at Ashland Theological Seminary in Ashland, Ohio, June 2012. I also graduated from New York Theological Seminary in May 2015 with a Master's Degree in Pastoral Care and Counseling. I also completed two internships in Clinical Pastoral Education (C.P.E.). The writing of this dissertation now indicates that I am in the latter process in the hope of attaining the Doctor of Ministry Degree in May 2020.

The issues of the clergy concerning the reasons why pastors avoid a counseling ministry have some validity, but the African American church has to be more diligent in

²⁴ Thom S. Rainer, "Seven Reasons Why Many Pastors Avoid a Counseling Ministry," <https://thomrainer.com/2018/10/seven-reasons-many-pastors-avoid-counseling-ministry/> (accessed November 7, 2019).

finding ways to building strong marriages and relationships because of the negative affect on our men, but especially on our women. The answer to the first of the seven reasons pastors avoid the counseling ministry is to pursue a degree(s) in the areas that will help them in counseling or to ensure that they have others who are qualified.

It is because of this important demonstration project that I now have a chance to help make a difference in the lives of a married couple through counseling. I approached this task with prayer and confidence that what I have studied in seminary (Pastoral Care and Counseling and Clinical Pastoral Education-Internship) and my love for people would be sufficient. I certainly did not feel unfruitful and I could sense by the actions and reactions of the couple when something I said was helpful as well as the words that had to be said to challenge them to do better toward each other. Sometimes the truth hurts and it is painful, but it must be dealt with.

There is too much at stake if we don't do all we can to help turn the tide of the decline of African American men in marriage and relationship in the black church. Dr. Johnnie McCann demonstrated in his ministry that we can be fruitful in ministry when we have not only the education but also the passion that leads us to be willing to sacrifice time and energy to help our African American men and women to build strong marriages and relationships; therefore, strengthening the black church. Let's move on to the second misconception in marriages, which Dr. McCann said could have a negative outcome, that is, if you take love for granted.

The Second Misconception Is Related to Love and Romance.

We feel that positive events and experiences should sustain our emotions long term. So, a trip to Hawaii or a great Valentine's Day will fuel our marriage for a while as if we were earning points. But, that's not true. Just like the children of Israel received

manna each day but couldn't store it up, a marriage needs to be fed fresh manna on a daily basis. Love is a perishable commodity. You can't bank good feelings. Relationships are built on a day-to-day basis. You need to tell your mate every day you love them. And get excited! One of our participants in this workshop shared with me their partner no longer brings her flowers and other things that were regularly done. When she asked him why, his reply to her was that it was no longer needed. One of the bibliographies that I read has something worth sharing that might be helpful to someone concerning this second misconception. *By Grace: The Challenges, Strengths, and Promises of African American Marriages* has the following passage.

This book is not a theological examination of marriage in the African American community, and I am certainly not a theologian. However, it is important to understand the title of the book and its connection to African American marriage. To do so, one must first understand what is meant by grace. There is a saying: "There but for the grace of God go I. This statement starts with the premise that one does not earn grace. You do not receive it for something you have or have not done. You cannot build up points and use them later. Instead, grace is something that God gives. The unknown author that coined the aforementioned phrase was essentially saying that through God's favor and mercy one is able to transcend challenges and obstacles with success. This success cannot then be fully attributed to what you have or not done. According to the U.S. Guinness Book of World Records, the longest marriage was that of Herbert and Zelmyra Fisher of New Bern, North Carolina (Sawyer, 2013). The couple had been married for 86 years until Herbert's death in 2011. This African American couple had been married through the Great Depression, three wars, the Civil Right Movement, and 15 presidents. When asked for the secret to the longevity of their marriage, Mrs. Fisher said, "There isn't any secret. It was God that kept us together" (Hendricks, 2011). Their experience reinforces the idea that, for many African Americans, marriage is rooted in grace. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and not of yourselves, it is a gift of God" (Ephesians 2: 8-9 NKJV). The Fishers were religious people but not within the same denomination. They had an interfaith marriage in which they worshipped in different churches. However, the acknowledgement of grace was the center point of this 86 – year marriage. There is another scripture that says, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). The Fishers also acknowledged that they had to make a choice to be committed, to honor and love each other, to be respectful,

and to treat each other with kindness. In summary, the title for this book is purposeful and important. *By Grace* stands as a reminder that despite the challenges experienced in black marriages, there is also hope and there are great examples of black marriages that serve as models. While there are specific tools and tasks that can be learned to make marriages healthy and sustainable, the presence of grace continues to be acknowledged as a thriving element of successful marriages.²⁵

The misconception related to love and romance brings to mind another situation that happened with a married couple whose marriage was not only on the rocks but needed a miracle to reconcile the couple's differences. When his wife had a birthday that represented a milestone in her life, the husband went all out and rented an expensive place and had the party catered and invited a host of family and friends and his wife received from him and others very lovely gifts both monetary and otherwise.

The fact is this grandeur did absolutely nothing to enhance their marriage. When it was vacation time for them, he planned a trip to Las Vegas, and then on to San Francisco. Once again, he spent a lot of money for this trip thinking this would help their failing marriage but the trip was a disaster and they ended up spending time in separate places and slept in separate beds. They separated shortly after that and within two years they were divorced.

Dr. McCann was on point when he said, you can't store up love. A marriage needs to be fed fresh manna on a daily basis. Love is a perishable commodity. Can you imagine what this marriage could have been if this couple was willing to put in the hard work? Certainly, an expensive birthday party and a vacation in Las Vegas and San

²⁵ Tricia B. Bent-Goodly, "African American Marriages at the Intersection: Challenges, Strengths, and Resilience," in Chapter 1 of *By Grace: The Challenges, Strengths, and Promise of African American Marriages*, <https://www.naswpress.org/publications/diversity/inside/african-american-marriages-chapter.html> (accessed November 7, 2019).

Francisco would not have been necessary if he could have only done the little things that matter every day. Once again I quote that amazing article we just read about grace, “The Fishers also acknowledged that they had made a choice to be committed, honor and love each other, to be respectful, and to treat each other with kindness.”²⁶ Those are the important ingredients that will make marriages and relationships solid as a rock. Therefore, like the mighty sequoia tree, it can withstand the intense environment pressure that comes in every marriage.

Practical Ways to Deal with Building Stronger Marriages without Dependency

We can learn another important lesson from the lives of the Fishers who hold the U.S. Guinness Book of World Records for the longest married couple with 86 years of marriage. The Fishers shared their lives together yet they were not over dependent on each other. In every marriage, there should be independence and interdependence. Dependence is another word for people who cannot do without the other. When I married my wife Terry, I understood that I was an important part of her life, but I knew that I was not all of her life. Long before me she had her parents, sisters, friends, career, church family, and ministry.

“The Fishers were religious people but not within the same denomination. They had an interfaith marriage in which they worshipped in different churches.” How do you think they would have fared if they would have been fussing and fighting over whose church they needed to attend? They settled all of that when they committed to love each other, to be respectful, and to treat each other with kindness. With that kind of love, your marriage is secure.

²⁶ Ibid.

There is this lovely lady in my church who has been a member for over fifty years. She has for the most part raised her children, grandchildren, and now great-grandchildren in our church. She is not only a choir member and a good soloist, but is also one of our Official Church Mothers. Not long ago, my wife and I received an invitation from her to attend her sixtieth wedding anniversary. I knew she was married but I had never seen her husband in church or in the neighborhood. We attended their sixtieth wedding anniversary along with nearly one hundred other family and friends in a large catering hall and what a great time we had.

For the first time, I met this lovely lady's husband and a host of other family members. The testimonies from the children and their spouses, great grandchildren, as well as the husband and wife were overwhelming. The love, commitment, and the respect they had for one another was the key to their sixty years of marriage. The Fishers, in their 86 years of marriage, did not attend the same church. In spite of the husband of this church mother not being a church attender, he is a loving, caring husband and has been a good father, grandfather, and great grandfather.

In order for some marriages to work without all the drama focus on your over dependence on your partner, you are going to have to "Build a Life Outside of Your Relationship." If your entire world revolves around your relationship, you are most likely not taking time to nurture friendships or take care of yourself. Maintaining a sense of autonomy is critical. In her book, *For Better: How the Surprising Science of Happy Couples Can Help Your Marriage Succeed*, author Tara Parker-Pope says that "The happiest couples... are those who have interests and support beyond the twosome."²⁷

²⁷ Tara Parker-Pope, *For Better: How the Surprising Science of Happy Couples Can Help Your Marriage Succeed* (New York: Dutton, 2010), quoted by Sarah Jane Gilman, "A Chemistry Set for 'The

When you are in love, it's easy to want to be around someone all the time, but it's not necessarily healthy. Various surveys show that happy couples maintain friendships and hobbies outside the relationship. How many times have you heard about friends that complain that they never see their friends anymore now that they are in relationships? It's a problem.

Don't rely on your partner for your happiness and fulfillment. Happiness is an inside job, so make time for you and explore things that make you come alive inside. By doing so, you will be empowered to come back to your relationship feeling full and complete.²⁸

Another Misconception Is That Once We've Fallen Out of Love, We Can't Get It Back.

In the book of Revelations 2:4-5, God is speaking to the church at Ephesus: "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first." So, it is possible to get that love back, but it takes hard work. What is it that you did at first in your relationship? You pursued each other with passion; you were polite; you were selfless; and you were romantic and thoughtful. You put energy into your relationship.

Dr. McCann said energetic pursuit is one of God's laws for marriage. When you ignore it, your marriage will suffer. Embrace it and pursue one another, every single day. Work at your marriage. Take action and show each other romance. One of the romantic books in the Bible is in the Song of Solomon. The Shulamite!

Science of a Good Marriage," <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126474676> (accessed November 7, 2019).

²⁸ James, "Relationship Advice."

He brought me to the banqueting house, And his banner over me was love.
Sustain me with cakes of raisins, Refresh me with apples, For I am
lovesick. His right hand embraces me. I charge you, O daughters of
Jerusalem. By the gazelles or by the does of the field, Do not stir up nor
awaken love Until it pleases (Song of Sol. 2: 4-7).

If you will read this entire Song of Solomon, it could help your marriage be more romantic. Work on You! You can't change anyone other than you. Remember beloved, a good marriage entailed work. Before I continue in this final misconception about marriage and relationships, I promised you some good news concerning the couple that is in counseling with me as a result of this demonstration project. They have finished their homework assignment, which was to read Dr. Johnnie McCann's book, *Marriage Is No Joke*. They will resume their final counseling session next week. The couple has informed me that their relationship is better and they are willing to work hard on it.

Once again, I must reiterate, forgiveness can be inactive by one person, but it takes two persons to agree to reconciliation. When a marriage has been depleted of love and purpose, it is because the couple no longer has the desire to work at it. The couple that I am in counseling with had indicated that they were on the verge of throwing in the towel because of the continued disrespect shown to each other that end up in abusive words that are hurting and degrading. But, yet, they still held out hope when they heard about my demonstration project on marriage and relationships. There is also hope for marriages and relationships that have fallen out of love.

The importance of a good counselor can make a difference. Love is more than a feeling; it is an action.

Love is patient, love is kind and not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1Cor. 13:4-7 NASB).

In Dr. Johnnie McCann's last of three misconceptions concerning marriage and relationships, let's look at the possibilities of a rekindling of love that has dissipated or has eroded due to neglect. No one is satisfied with a relationship that they are not valued as the first priority. Jesus certainly did not tolerate it in the church of Ephesus as Dr. McCann already stated. But mercy and grace were extended to the church when Jesus said, "Remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first" (Rev. 2:5). I am convinced that through seminars, educational workshops, and the preached word, married couples in our church can grow and be rekindled if they remember what they did when they first started their pursuit of each other.

The first of the misconceptions should have helped us to understand that love is more than an emotion but a commitment to hard work. The first misconception is that if we married the right person, loving emotions will occur effortlessly throughout the marriage, but soul mates are not born—they are made. Just by reading and meditating on this first misconception is a path to rekindle love that has dissipated or has eroded due to neglect.

The second misconception is related to love and romance. Love is a perishable commodity. You can't bank good feelings. Relationships are built on the day to day. Love cannot be taken for granted. It must be expressed in not only words but also deeds. This second misconception is also a path to rekindle love that has dissipated or eroded due to neglect.

Lastly, it will not be impossible to rekindle love in marriages and relationships, which have dissipated or eroded through neglect when we have worked hard and earnestly based on the teachings of the late Rev. Dr. Johnnie McCann and others who

have contributed to this demonstration project to help turn the tide in the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships in the black church.

The first step to rekindling a love that has dissipated or eroded by neglect is understanding the neglect factor. Dr. McCann constantly drove this home in both the seminar and educational workshop. While this demonstration project has helped most of the participants, it has also brought out some concerns of some who are in relationships that perhaps need to be in question. As I mentioned earlier, let me reiterate that one of our participants has approached me and expressed her concern with her relationship due to her partner not doing what they first did when they started dating. He was thoughtful, brought flowers and gifts, and often took her out to dinner and movies. When she confronted him with why he has stopped doing these things, he actually said that it was no longer needed.

Dr. McCann was on point when he used Revelation 2:4-5, when God confronted the church of Ephesus. “But I have this against you, you have left your first love.” Notice this, He never said you have lost your first love, but you have left your first love. That means that you know where it is and it is possible for you to go back to where you left it. Yes, there is a possibility of a rekindling of love that has dissipated or eroded due to neglect.

Let’s go back to the importance of understanding the neglect factor. In the book, *The Relationship Cure: A 5 Step Guide to Strengthening Your Marriage, Family and Friendships*, the authors talked about how we connect emotionally.²⁹ Dr. Gottman shares a story about a married couple that was in marriage counseling therapy with him. They

²⁹ Gottman and DeClaire, *The Relationship Cure*, 3.

had not been intimate with each other for over six months. The couple that he names Phil and Tina are in their thirties and have two children. They are well employed and have good friends and family and have been in love with each other until an unforeseen problem that causes that love to dissipate and erode due to neglect.³⁰

Tina's company was going through a major reorganization and it caused a lot of stress on Tina, therefore she let it affect her life at home and her intimacy with her husband. Phil has done those little things that he has always done to try to get his wife to respond to his sexual advances. He tried to tell Tina that everything would be all right, but nothing he said could change her response. Showing affection by kissing, rubbing her stomach, touching her while in bed just did nothing to cause her to respond.

Tina was aware of the situation but seems to get more tense and agitated and could not allow herself to become intimate with her husband due to her all-consuming problems at work and she might have thought that the work situation would change and she could get back to being intimate with her husband. The love in their marriage instead began to dissipate and erode due to neglect. Phil is now turned off and feels neglected because from his understanding is no matter what I do my wife is not loving me the way she used to, so this marriage is in question and we need some help and maybe going to marriage counseling may help. For Tina it was not working also. The therapist listens to them as they address their emotional needs. Finally, after a long silence the wife begins to speak. I missed making love to you. I missed the way it used to be. Phil was able to respond to her without placing blame, but to see her emotional needs. This is a good place to start because you never told me that before.

³⁰ Ibid.

The importance of communicating each other's emotional information can be helpful in marriages and relations.

Phil and Tina are like many couples I see in marital therapy. Whatever conflicts the couples may have—sex, money, housework, kids—all of them long for evidence that their spouse understand and care about what they are feeling. Sharing such information through words and behavior is essential for improving any significant relationship.³¹

The misconception that once we've fallen out of love then we can't get it back proves to be unfounded. In my opinion, the key factor in the situation with the couple we just read about is understanding the neglect factor and then moving toward a solution that will allow the flow of love to rekindle. Most of the time it will take a third party to help a couple to understand the neglect factor and the skilled marriage counselor can be an invaluable access.

The words of the late Dr. Johnnie McCann in his teaching on the last misconception—that once we've fallen out of love we can't get it back—can be seen in the work of the counseling of Dr. Gottman to Phil and Tina that you can get it back if the couple is willing to understand the neglect factor and work at understanding each other's emotional needs.

Dr. McCann simply used the scripture in the book of Revelation and pointed out that if the church of Ephesus who left their first love for God would remember from where they have fallen and repent and do what they did at first, then the relationship would be restored. It is through this demonstration project and the participants that I can see where we are fulfilling what we set out to do in our challenge statement, to find ways to build positive relationships and strong marriages; thereby, strengthening the church

³¹ Ibid., 4.

through seminars, educational workshops and the preached word. I never thought that I would be counseling a married couple whose marriage was on the verge of separation and perhaps divorce. They attended the seminar as a last resort to perhaps save their marriage. The possibilities of a rekindling of love that has dissipated or eroded due to neglect can be restored.

Another lady participated in this demonstration project but her partner has not been in attendance. Therefore, based on what she shared with me, it could be that the relationship may be in jeopardy, not because he did not attend, but because he is not meeting her emotional needs. They are not married but have been in a relationship for quite some time. Perhaps, if her partner was present in the demonstration project, he might have received some help that would benefit their relationship.

The emotional factor in relationships cannot be underestimated. I will share with you one more except from Dr. John M. Gottman's book in that he uses the word "bid" to describe the emotional factor in relationships. "A bid can be a question, a gesture, a look, a touch—any single expression that says, 'I want to feel connected to you.'" A response to a bid is just that—a positive or negative answer to somebody's request for emotional connection.

Dr. Gottman speaks of five steps in the bidding process:

1. Analyze the way you bid and the way you respond to others' bids.
2. Discover how your brain's emotional command systems affect your bidding process.
3. Examine how your emotional heritage impacts your ability to connect with others and your style of bidding.
4. Develop your emotional communication skills.
5. Find shared meaning with others.³²

³² Ibid., 16.

There are three primary points that Dr. Gottman brings out that I believe are noteworthy: (1) Turning towards; (2) Turning against; (3) Turning away.³³ The first point means to act in a positive way toward your partner's bid for emotional support or connection. If married couples can build a high percentage of turning toward each other, they can weather the disappointment better when they disagree and are angry about something that was said or done.³⁴

Married couples stay together in times of crisis because they developed a habit of turning toward each other and that's called staying connected. Positive bidding is when we respond to our partner's emotional needs in a loving and caring way. That is what I am trying to do with the couple that is now in counseling with me because of the demonstration project that was designed to build positive relationships and strong marriages, therefore strengthening the black church.

The second point is turning against. When married couples bid for emotional support and are denied by their partner, it often causes them to turn against each other. It does not happen suddenly, but over a period of time when their need for emotional connection is not met. This is serious and can lead to the destruction of the relationship.

The third point is turning away. This is because one or both partners have developed a pattern of ignoring each other's bid for emotional support. At this very moment as I am writing, my wife is about to leave for work so I get up to escort her to the door and she turns and tells me about a meeting she will be facilitating this morning at her job. So, I said to her, oh, you must be excited about it, and it's great to enjoy what

³³ Ibid., 27.

³⁴ Ibid., 36-37.

you are doing. That is emotional support. Can you imagine if I did not show any concern for what she does? She would not bother to share with me anything else that she is involved with on her job. When she comes home, I know that she will share with me about her day and how she feels.

Well, sure enough, my wife returned home to a home cooked meal that I prepared and was delighted how co-workers received her presentation. I was so proud of her and let her know that through words and body language. Listening involves more than just hearing, but looking your partner in the face with a smile and being attentive. I remember what the late Rev. Dr. Johnnie McCann said in the seminar and I can't help but to laugh. He said, "Women are vocal and will have their say. Women on the average use 25,000 words a day and men 15,000, so when she comes home, she still has a lot left to say."

Every time you let other things hold your attention over that of your partner, you are not connecting emotionally, you are turning away. The good news is that you can turn that around. Dr. Gottman's book can help you understand how to cure your relationship.

The last misconception cited by Dr. McCann—that once we've fallen out of love, we can't get it back—has been proven wrong if married couples are willing to work at their marriage and get the professional help that may be necessary.

As I continue to counsel the couple that I have spoken about throughout this dissertation, I am cognizant of their dilemma. But they have been caught in a vortex that overwhelms them because of the lack of knowledge of how godly relationships are built. They really want to be together, or else they would not have come to this demonstration project on marriage and relationships in the black church.

The teaching of the late Dr. Johnnie McCann in the seminar and the workshop has been a challenge not only to them, but to others who have hope for better marriages and relationships. And it also may be the end of a relationship that is not meeting the emotional needs of another participant who expressed her concerns about her partner who would not take part in this project. Based on evaluations and results, the participants would like to see a marriage and relationship ministry emerge from this demonstration project.

So, remember, at the start of this demonstration project, I had no idea that I would be counseling a couple whose marriage has dissipated and eroded by neglect for the lack of understanding of how a Christian marriage works. Well that's what we set out to accomplish! To help turn the tide! The title of this demonstration project is, "The Shift from a Decline to Stabilization as It Relates to African American Men in Marriage and Relationships in the Black Church."

John M. Gottman's book has some good practical points that are helpful, indeed, and I used it because I have found its bidding theory to be especially a paradigm to understand the quest for emotional connection. Dr. McCann has taught us from the outset that his workshops are "wordshops" that are based on the word of God and he certainly has kept it in that arena. We shall also conclude in that setting with excerpts from Greg and Julie Alexander's book: *Marriage 911: How God Saved Our Marriage (And Can Save Yours, Too!*

There are three questions that the authors ask of those who are serious about forgiveness and reconciliation in their marriage and I will quote hereunder those three questions verbatim. Thus:

1. Is this marriage something you want, and is it something you're willing to work on, and will you do the things we prescribe for you?
2. Do you have the faith that Jesus Christ has the ability and the power to redeem your marriage and restore it to where it needs to be?
3. Do you give God the permission to come into your life and to redeem it?

Consider these questions very carefully. These are the same questions we ask when couples come to us privately for coaching. And if you can honestly answer yes to all three, then we think we can help you get your marriage back on track.³⁵

Now as I conclude my writing on the educational workshop, I recommend this book because it deals with the spiritual aspect of marriage in the same way that Dr. Johnnie McCann has based his teaching on “The Word of God.” I will give you the contents of this book to sort of whet your appetite and leave it up to you as to whether you want to read the entire book.

1. We Need A Divorce
2. In The Beginning
3. The Missing Ingredient
4. How Do You Do This “Marriage” Thing?
5. Making A Ton Of Money
6. The Embarrassing Details
7. Rock Bottom
8. Dying To Self
9. Learning To Forgive
10. Do Something!
11. Undoing The Damage
12. Building The Apostolate
13. There Are Always Lessons To Learn – Afterword

³⁵ Greg and Julie Alexander, *Marriage 911: How God Saved Our Marriage (And Can Save Yours Too!)* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 2011), xi.

The teaching of the late Rev. Dr. Johnnie McCann and all the other references that were mentioned have the heartbeat of the main ingredient that can help keep marriages and relationships on track and that is “work hard at it!” So, this educational workshop has covered what it will take to turn the tide of “The Decline of African American Men in Marriage and Relationships in the Black Church.” This demonstration project will find ways to build positive relationships and strong marriages; therefore, strengthening the church through seminars, educational workshops and the preached word.

This educational workshop has reached its goal to teach our participants the theological aspect of “Forgiveness and Reconciliation.” The question on how the theory of forgiveness leading to reconciliation applies to marriage and relationships has been answered both theologically and practically.

As to what theological voices can empower married couples to recognize the covenantal underpinnings of their relationships has numerous witnesses from the carpenter of Galilee and the apostle Paul and voices of yesterday and today it’s all recorded in here.

The evaluation is in the response of our participants who have declared that not only have they been blessed, but also this must continue in our church. The couples that are in counseling with me now have hope because of the seminar, educational workshop, and the preached word. We give thanks and praises to the highest God for what he has done. We are grateful to the late Rev. Dr. Johnnie McCann for his dynamic teaching with passion and in his love for the God he served and now has gone from labor to reward.

CHAPTER 4 THE PREACHED WORD

What social behaviors and cultural changes contribute to the decline of African American men as it relates to marriage and relationships in the black church? The following sermon will deal with this aspect.

Sermon May 31, 2019 at the Canaan Baptist Church
Text: Galatians 5:1-6 ESV
Subject: “I Am Liberated and Free to Love”

Introduction

I love watching the Animal Channel and wildlife in general. Recently, I watched an episode about the release of a snow leopard back into the wilderness of Asia after being nursed back to good health.

I cannot imagine that animal ever wanting to go back in the cage that held him in bondage even if he was treated well and nursed back to good health. He was created to be free and roam the Snowcap Mountains of Asia and to prey on the big horn sheep, which live on the rugged terrain of the mountain.

“I Am Liberated and Free to Love”; that is the title of this sermon. The dictionary defines the word, “liberate” as “to set free, as from imprisonment or bondage...to free (a nation or area) from control by a foreign or oppressive government.” Now watch this! “To free a group or individuals from social or economic constraints or discrimination

especially arising from traditional role expectations or bias.”³⁶ I will come back to this later.

In our text, the Apostle Paul is speaking to Gentile believers who, through his ministry, received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior through faith and therefore received the gift of salvation.

However, in Paul’s absence, the Gentile believers were visited by Judaizers who were jealous of the freedom that the believers had in Christ. The Judaizers told them that they needed to be circumcised according to the law as well as observe Jewish feast days and festivals.

Paul rebukes their attempts to follow the old covenant as well as those who were responsible for misleading them. In Galatians. 5:1-6, Paul says:

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by the law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

Can you imagine the Galatians having been set free from the Law of Moses that required circumcision of every male child on the eighth day? These are grown men. Do you know the pain involved in the process of circumcision in antiquity?

During the Abrahamic covenant in which circumcision is introduced as the sign of the covenant, a sharp stone was used to strip away the foreskin from the glans. In the 34th

³⁶ Dictionary.com, s.v. “liberate,” <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/liberate> (accessed March 7, 2020).

chapter of Genesis, there is a story about how circumcision was used to deceive and defeat the Hivites who were Gentiles. I will paraphrase the story.

One of Jacob's daughters, by the name of Dinah, was raped by Shechem who was a Hivite prince, but he fell in love with her and wanted to marry her. When Jacob heard about it, he informed his sons and they were angry. Hamor, the Hivite king and his son, Shechem, went to Jacob and asked for Dinah to become Shechem's wife because he loved her. The Hivite king offered them to become one in his land that included marrying each other's women and sharing each other's wealth.

Jacob seemed to agree with this offer, but his sons came up with an alternative that if they wanted to become one with them, the men had to become circumcised. The Hivites agreed to become circumcised. On the third day, they were sore and vulnerable, so the sons of Jacob led by Simeon and Levi took up their swords and killed all the men and took their women, children, and all their wealth. Jacob got angry and was afraid that the Canaanites and Perizzites, who had greater numbers than they had, would eventually attack them.

The Jews adopted circumcision as a religious ritual.

Much later in the Hellenic period, about 140 C.E., the Jewish authorities modified circumcision procedure to make it impossible for a Jew to appear to be an uncircumcised Greek. A radical new procedure called *peri'ah* was introduced by the priest and rabbis. In this procedure, the foreskin was stripped away from the glans, with which it is fused in the infant. In a painful procedure known today as a *synechotomy*, more foreskin was removed than before and the injury was correspondingly greater.³⁷

³⁷ CIRP, "History of Circumcision," <http://www.cirp.org/library/history/> (accessed August 1, 2019).

Note that the time of Paul's writing to the Galatians took place in the Hellenic period and this form of circumcision was indeed painful.

No wonder Paul addresses them in chapter 3:1, "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?"

The keeping of the Mosaic Law was much more than the moral law (Ten Commandments) but the observance of days and festivals, tithing of income and crops, dietary laws, seasons and years to observe. It added up to over 500!

Paul said: "If you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And if you become circumcised, you are debtor to keep the whole law." "For in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love."

Watch this! In verse 13, Paul says, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love, serve one another." In verse 14, Paul continues to say, "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"We are liberated and free to love!" Bondage can only take place if we accept traditional role-playing that supports the wider cultural view of who we are in their opinions of black men in particular. (Hold on. I'm going somewhere with this.)

Let's go back to the meaning of the word "liberated." It means to free a group or individuals from social or economic constraints or discrimination especially arising from traditional role expectations or bias. This leads me to my first initiative.

First, let's look at the crisis. Look at somebody and say: "we have a crisis concerning African American men in particular." In my challenge statement, I expressed

my concerns about the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships in the black church. I believe we have addressed the biblical aspect of this problem in our seminar and the theological aspect in the educational workshop.

The sociological aspect takes on a different twist because it addresses the culture and structural sins. There is a difference between personal sins and structural sins. We are free and liberated to love when we confess our sins to the Lord “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God...” (Rom. 3:23), “for the wages of sin is death...” (Ro. 6:23). “If we confess with our mouth and believe in our heart that God raised Jesus from the dead we shall be saved...” (Ro. 10: 9). All these verses speak of personal sins.

Structural sins are social and cultural in nature and rooted in traditionalism and role-playing. Structural sins are those, which are done against you to keep you in bondage to the ideologies of others more powerful than you. Structural sins are racism, sexism, inequality, and poverty. And those are just a few!

Racism: Racism refers to the combination of power to dominate by one race over other races or ethnic groups that is grounded in the historical assumption and prejudice that a particular race is innately superior to the other.³⁸ Racism is [also] a systematic denial and deformation of people’s history and humanity rooted in hierarchies of race.³⁹

Sexism: Sexism is defined as male gender and/or sex as the primary determinant in establishing and justifying relationships.⁴⁰

“Racism makes people denigrate their past, and sexism lifts up the male gender as superior...The Judeo-Christian tradition can promote and reinforce black and white

³⁸ Edward P. Wimberley, *Counseling African American Marriages and Families* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 45.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

female inferior positions by reinforcing racism and sexism.”⁴¹ (Wow!) In their convention a few years ago, the Southern National Convention adopted a policy that a woman’s role is to serve her husband. Role-playing in marriage and relationships consists in the belief that your role is more important than your partner’s.

I was listening to a Christian radio program on my way to the Ministers’ Conference in Hampton VA, when I heard a woman saying that she is to obey her husband and he is the final word and that is the way God has planned it. When I heard the name of the radio station and the program, I then understood it was Southern Baptist.

No one has the right to keep you in bondage through social injustice or roles that are biased and prejudiced.

We don’t serve roles! Roles exist to serve the needs of individuals and the needs of others. People are not created to serve roles.

Jesus made a point to the Pharisees in Mark 2: 25-27 NIV, “In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.” Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” The Sabbath was intended to help people, not burden them.

Role-playing in marriage and relationships has been a burden especially on women (I do role-playing to keep them in check). We were not created to serve roles! But roles exist to serve our needs.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Paul's argument with the Galatians was that they have been liberated from the law and are free to love: "For you brethren, have been called into liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love, serve one another" (Galatians 5:13). We Are Liberated and Free to Love!

One of Paul's most beautiful pericopes of scriptures on love is 1 Cor. 13:1-3:

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophesy and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

I don't know about you "up in here, up in here," but this blows my mind! Being liberated and free to love means more than a display of gifts and sacrificial giving, but watch this! Love is a verb; it is a more active display of what it does than what you say.

Love is patient, love is kind and not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails (1 Cor. 13:4-8a).

Authentic love is liberating because it seeks to do what is right, regardless of how you may feel. The culture may be biased and demands that if you want to live in this society, then this is the role you must play, but love has no such demands.

There are those who would argue that 1 Corinthians, the thirteenth chapter, is the love chapter of the New Testament. I have to agree in part with that assumption, but it is a broad statement that covers how love should be. However, the book of Ephesians explains how it applies to us in our relationships. There are four distinctive divisions in Ephesians, Chapter 5, that help us build stronger relationships in Christ and with each other. "Walk in love, Walk in light, Walk in wisdom, Marriage – Christ and the Church."

Walking in love. “Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (Eph. 5:1-2 NASB). Those of us who understand the significance of the love of Christ for us and what his life, death, and resurrection mean to those who have received Him into their lives strive to walk in love daily. To walk in love means not only do you love God, but you love your neighbor also. In Matthew 22: 37 NASB, Jesus quotes Moses in Deuteronomy 6:5. “You shall love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” He did not stop there. Yes, the first and great commandment is to love the Lord, but there is a second like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

To walk in love and fellowship with Christ and your neighbor is a recipe for all positive relationships and certainly marriage. Verses 2-21 give you a description of how not to walk. I will not take the time in this sermon to explain it because it is self-explanatory, but I will end with this scripture where my focus and task is: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Can you imagine what our relationships would be like if we let Christ be Lord in our relationships and marriages?

Walk in the light. To walk in the light is to stay focused in spite of the darkness that will cast its shadow on your progress to walk in the light. 1 John 1:7 reads: “But if we walk in the light as he is himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” I know it is easier said than done. Our quest to live a life pleasing to God will invite an onslaught by the enemy that will try your very soul and you will not win every battle, but if you do not quit, and are willing to humble yourself after being defeated, the light will lead you to victory.

Walk in wisdom. “Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:15-17 NASB). Walking in wisdom requires that you devote your time also to study, meditate, and make the most of every relationship that we enter into. Study it, think about it, will it bring glory to God? Will it enhance my life for the better? Don’t make quick or foolish moves on emotion and of the flesh, and understand what the will of the Lord is in your life.

Marriage-Christ and the Church.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (v. 25). This scripture has literally changed my perspective on marriage and has served as a paradigm for a successful marriage that is Christ-centered. This has eradicated any need for role-playing and hierarchy in my marriage because “I am Liberated and Free to love.”

Paul declares to the Galatians: “for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avail anything, but faith working through love.” In other words, “you foolish Galatians, why would you mutilate yourselves by the act of circumcision when it does not mean anything?” And also, being uncircumcised does not mean anything either. “But faith working through love means everything.” Love never fails!

We cannot allow the dominant culture’s standards of role-playing and hierarchy dictate to African American men and women how we should live. “We Are Liberated and Free to Love.”

Let me speak a bit more about the “crisis” of Black men before I move on to the challenge.

It is asserted in literature that black male socialization is developed around three interrelated postulates: (1) That black men have been emasculated (literally and figuratively); (2) The emasculation process has prevented black men from full maturity; and (3) The emasculation process has made black men poor husbands and fathers.

Black Men have been Emasculated Literally and Figuratively.

We must critically analyze the social and cultural forces influencing the lives of African American men and women. Yes, we are still the targets of racism, but we have managed to thrive despite racism. Police are quick to arrest us, shoot and kill us with impunity. The penal system has far more black men incarcerated than any other ethnic group although we make up just 12% of the population.

There is something desperately wrong with a society that shows its bias in so many ways against black men. It seems like every week a black man is released from prison after spending half of his life there for a crime he never committed, and he is released only because of DNA, or someone or an organization never gave up the fight.

When They See Us. The Central Park Five.

When They See Us is a movie narrating the struggle of the Central Park Five. In 1989, five teens from Harlem become trapped in a nightmare when they are falsely accused of a brutal attack of a woman jogger in Central Park. All five were convicted of the crime and given long prison sentences. In 2001, someone else eventually confessed to the crime, and the Central Park Five's convictions were vacated in 2002, after they had spent more than a decade in prison. This case epitomizes the social and culture bias of the penal system that does great harm to black men and it is still happening now. Donald Trump even took out an ad in the newspapers for the death penalty for these innocent

young men and now that he is President, he still has not apologized and still believes they are guilty.

Structural sins are inflicted on us by the dominant culture that does not see us as equally endowed by our Creator who created humankind.

The Emasculation Process Has Prevented Black Men from Full Maturity.

Nathan Glazer, who is mentioned in the Moynihan Report that I will talk about shortly, describes the particular barbarity of the slavery of black people in America.

The most perplexing question about American slavery, which has never been altogether explained, and which indeed most Americans hardly know exists, has been stated by Nathan Glazer as follows: “Why was American slavery the most awful the world has ever known?” The only thing that can be said with certainty is that this is true: it was.⁴²

Glazer continues,

[In the United States], the slave was totally removed from the protection of organized society (compare the elaborate provisions for the protection of slaves in the Bible), his existence as a human being was given no recognition by any religious or secular agency, he was totally ignorant of and completely cut off from his past, and he was offered absolutely no hope for the future. His children could be sold, his marriage was not recognized, his wife could be violated or sold...and he could also be subjected, without redress, to frightful barbarities.⁴³

I believe that African Americans, especially men, have been emasculated to the point where some behavior is systemic. If it is not one setback, there is another, and it never seems to cease. Now there is a new “Jim Crow.”

For as the United States celebrates the nation’s “triumph over race” with the election of Barack Obama, the majority of young black men in major American cities are locked behind bars or labeled felons for life. Jim Crow

⁴² Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “The Roots of the Problem,” chapter III of *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Moynihan Report), Office of Policy Planning and Research United States Department of Labor, March 1965, <https://www.dol.gov/general/aboutdol/history/webid-moynihan/moynchapter3> (accessed November 1, 2019).

⁴³ Ibid.

laws were wiped off the books decades ago, but today, an astounding percentage of the African American community is warehoused in prisons or trapped in a permanent, second-class status— much like their grandparents before them, who lived under an explicit system of control.⁴⁴

The sociological/cultural environment, back then and now, contributes to the emasculation of African American men. As I look back over my life, I know if it were not for the Lord in my life, I would have continued down the road of destruction. And even with Him in my life, I had to be willing to grow and learn to love myself and raise my self-esteem. The road to maturity is about spiritual transformation. It is about growing in the love of Jesus the Christ and letting your light shine in the dark places where the culture of this world wants to render you as less than worthy of equality and justice.

To avoid being a victim of the emasculation process, you have to be educated about your history and the journey of others who gave their lives so you could have freedom both physically and mentally. “I am Liberated and Free to Love.” I will not be defeated in my quest to be the best husband that I can be to my partner.

The emasculation process has made black men poor husbands and fathers.

Back in 2015, I wrote my capstone project entitled, “Why Are So Many Men Missing from the African American Family?” I have been pursuing answers to this question for some time and it is my passion to help black men to be the loving and caring people that God created us to be. In our seminar and educational workshop, we have put primary emphasis on our personal sins for the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships in the black church. We do not make excuses for our sins against God’s covenant and what He expects of us.

⁴⁴ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 14.

The theological aspect of forgiveness and reconciliation is necessary for our marriages and relationships to continue to grow. Forgiveness is paramount and vital for our peace with God, but reconciliation can only take place if two parties agree.

We are now dealing with the sociological and cultural factors that we as African American men and women have to fight against. These are the Structural Sins. The question is: “What social behaviors and cultural changes contribute to the decline of African American men as it relates to marriage and relationships in the black church?” What are some of the social/cultural factors that contribute to African American men being poor husbands and fathers? Time would not permit me to mention all of them, and I do not know them all anyway. Also, many of those factors have already been mentioned in some ways and I do not want to sound redundant but I have to because the more things change, the more they look the same.

The sociological ills that continue to plague African Americans are economics, education, unemployment, racial discrimination, and family structure. Until these issues are seriously addressed, we will continue to see a decline in marriage and relationships in the black church and society in general.

The title of this sermon is, “I Am Liberated and Free to Love.” And as mentioned earlier, the word “liberated” is defined as “to free (a group or individuals) from social or economic constraints or discrimination especially arising from traditional role expectations or bias.”

Guess what? All of these are sociological issues that the dominant culture has placed upon black and brown people and minorities. Our men have always been the targets of discrimination in areas, which would enable them to take care of their families.

“Can I preach this?” The highest rate of unemployment in the U.S. is among African American men. Economics is essential to the survival of marriages in every race and ethnicity, especially in this capitalistic society and more so with the African American family.

My hypothesis is that one major reason that there is a decline of African American men in marriage and relationships is due to financial lack. No matter how much they talk about the rise of the stock market or the low unemployment rates that reflect on how well the rich and corporate executives are faring, many African American men are still working on minimum wages; and not a living wage.

Let’s elaborate on what I said about “the more things change, the more they look the same.” After the election of our first African American President, Barack Obama, there was a sense of hope. An intelligent man who is married to a lovely African American woman from the Southside of Chicago, Michelle Obama, and two daughters, Malia and Natasha (Sasha) certainly model what a good marriage should be. They were members of a prominent black church in Chicago. Their faith has contributed to their high profile lives, which exemplify what commitment is about, to marriage and relationships, to God and country, and to all citizens regardless of race, creed, color, gay, straight or lesbian.

In all their years in public service until this day, there has not been one scandal or rumor of infidelity or indiscretion. The point I am making about the Obamas is that you do not have to come from the so-called right side of town or follow the dominant culture in order to make a difference; you can make a difference when you know that “you are liberated and free to love.” When you read their books *The Audacity of Hope*, *Dreams*

from My Father, A Life in American History, or Michelle Obama's book entitled *Becoming*, it is about being inspired, no matter what the other culture may think of us. President Obama has instilled hope in African American men in particular and demonstrated that he was well aware of the decline in African American men in marriage and relationships, so he created an organization called, My Brother's Keeper. He understood the need for people to have role models, and it does take a village to raise a child.

Everybody present today is here because you love our black men who have suffered in this cultural environment. You want a man who is "liberated and free to love." The seminar and educational workshop, and now the preached word has been designed and formulated to help you in your relationships whether married, in a relationship, single and looking how to have sustainable relationships. Unfortunately, there are sociological or cultural circumstances that add up to structural sins that the dominant culture has used to control the minority.

The More Things Change, The More They Look the Same.

After eight years of Barak Obama as President, we now have Trump, someone who is obviously a racist, rich, unintelligent, narcissistic, corrupted, and has told more lies than anyone can count, supported by the religious right wing, the rise of white supremacy organizations and the NRA. The Republicans who spoke the truth about him, when they ran against him for the Republican nomination, have now gathered around him and are afraid to go against him, holding up their party over the interest of the country.

Racism is rising across the country; more black and brown people are killed by the police because they know they have a friend in the White House. The Supreme Court is being stacked with conservatives and is most likely to vote in this president's favor.

Voting rights have come under attack in the form of stricter I.D. laws and changing demographics. Most of his original cabinet members are no longer in office and at least seven are convicted felons. “Make America Great Again” is a slogan that only means keep white supremacy in charge.

When America catches a cold, African Americans get pneumonia. The more things change, the more they look the same. What social behaviors and cultural changes contribute to the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships in the black church? Economics, education, unemployment, racial discrimination, and family structure are ongoing issues that can be eradicated if the dominant culture, which includes both government as well as the private sector, can help change our misfortunes.

One of the references that I listed is “The Moynihan Report,” or *The Negro Family, the Case for National Action*, by the Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor in 1965. Remember what I said, “the more things change, the more they look the same.” Earlier, I said that African American marriages and the family structure had withstood slavery and Jim Crow, as well as other sociological ills until the middle sixties and seventies. It is my considered view that the decline in marriage and relationships are due to a broken covenant with God. I believe that to be a factor, but not the only factor.

Daniel Patrick “Pat” Moynihan was a well-known and popular Democratic senator from New York, who died on March 26, 2003. He had done some good work as our senator from New York. Long before Moynihan was a senator, he was a sociologist, who worked in the late President Lyndon B. Johnson’s administration. He held four degrees (BS, BA, MA, PhD). Honestly, I did not begin to dig deep into Moynihan until I

became a seminary student at Ashland Theological Seminary in 2009, when I wrote an essay on the African American family.

Once again, let me remind you of what I have said, before I tell this story that relates to the state of African American men and the sociological dilemma that contributes to the decline in marriage and relationships. “The more things change, the more they look the same.” Those that don’t know their past will repeat it! The subject of this sermon is, “We are Liberated and Free to Love” and that can happen not only by our spiritual transformation, but knowledge of the sociological-cultural environment that has kept us in bondage.

I was searching the web for information relating to black men in the penal system when I discovered the 1965 Moynihan Report (or the “Report”) entitled, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. This profound, prophetic, and informative report had a two-fold effect on me: it both disturbed and amazed me by the accuracy of its predictions. It was completed in 1965 when Johnson was president. His mission was to create a great society and to end poverty and gain equality for the neglected Negro, who was under the oppressive Jim Crow system, especially those in the South. Moynihan was the Assistant Secretary of Labor when he did his research on this problem and sent his findings to the president.

It focused on the deep roots of black poverty in America and concluded controversially that the relative absence of the nuclear families would greatly hinder African-Americans’ future progress toward economic and political equality. Moynihan argued that the rise in single mother families was not due to a lack of jobs, but rather to a

destructive vein in ghetto culture that could be traced back to slavery and Jim Crow discrimination.

The Moynihan Report has had long-lasting and important implications. Moynihan argued that without access to jobs and without the means to support families, black men would become alienated from their roles as husbands and fathers. This would cause rates of divorce, abandonment, and out-of-wedlock births to skyrocket in the black community (a trend that had already begun in the mid-1960s) leading to a vast increase in the number of female-headed households and the high rate of poverty, low educational outcomes, and inflated rates of abuse that are associated with them. Moynihan made a compelling argument for the provision of jobs, job programs, vocational training, and educational programs for the black community.

How does this tie into my challenge statement, “The decline of African American men in marriage and relationships in the Black Church?” Remember, this sermon is dealing with the sociological and cultural-environmental aspect of the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships in the black church. The question is: “What social behaviors and cultural changes contribute to the decline?” What I continue to argue is “the more things change, the more they look the same” and the findings and recommendations of the Moynihan report still apply to the main problem and dilemma facing the African American men and women in the twenty first-century.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan was not a prophet, but he was accurate. What he said over fifty years ago has come to fruition because he knew that the problem was one that was caused by the dominant culture, or to make it plain, the structural sins that continue to plague African Americans. President Lyndon Johnson was the only president other

than Abraham Lincoln who earnestly took on the fight to free African Americans from the sociological and cultural-environmental sins that have created ghettos and poverty throughout major cities in this country.

If you are not familiar with the major sociological changes that came as a result of the Moynihan Report, you need to read the whole report. Moynihan discusses in the Report the devastating effect of Jim Crow on many African American families. They had liberty, but not equality. They (i.e. African American families in the South) went from being exploited to marginalization. This included segregation, denial of access to public restrooms (“white only”), riding in the back of the buses and trains, and not being able to stay in public hotels. The Report was presented to President Lyndon Johnson who promised to take action towards the plight of African Americans who were severely mistreated and discriminated against. Johnson’s agenda was to create a great society and wage war on poverty. The Moynihan Report is a very important source.

From the time of its publication, the Report has been sharply attacked by American and civil rights leaders as examples of white patronizing, culture bias or even racism. The Report has, at various times, been condemned or dismissed by the NAACP, Reverend Jesse Jackson and Reverend Al Sharpton. Political commentator, Heather McDonald, writing in 2008 about the emerging problems of the Hispanic family, referred to the Report and noted that,

Conservatives of all stripes routinely praise Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s prescience for warning in 1965 that the breakdown of the black family

threatened the achievement of racial equality. They rightly blast those liberals who denounced Moynihan Report as an expression of bigotry.⁴⁵

I must, for the most part, say there is much in the Report with which to agree. Of course, I am looking back on history, while the others were present during the writing of the Report. This was a great chance for America to change its sociological ways and cultural biases and bring on a great society. Thurgood Marshall was the first African American appointed to serve as Associate Justice of the Supreme Court by President Johnson. Through the Equal Opportunity Act, black people were no longer the last to be hired and the first to be fired. African Americans were accepted in the elite colleges and universities due to Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC), and a good number of African Americans were appointed to high positions in government, as well as won elections in various cities across the country. Everything was in place; changes were being made; and the 1964 Voting Rights Act passed in congress. Economic Opportunity, Head Start (educational), The Job Corps were major factors in helping to better the economics of African Americans. Martin Luther King Jr. and President Johnson worked together and things were looking good, until the Vietnam War choked off the Great Society.

The More Things Change, the More They Look the Same.

Since those times, we have lost just about everything we gained. With the dominant culture claiming reverse discrimination and winning in nearly every court battle and with the Supreme Court being stacked with conservatives, the outlook does not look very promising for African Americans.

⁴⁵ Jonathan S. Tobin, "In Trashing Ryan, Liberals Forget Moynihan," March 14, 2014, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/politics-ideas/liberals-democrats/in-trashing-ryan-liberals-forget-moynihan/> (accessed December 2, 2019).

African American men and women are living in difficult times in a divided country under a President who has shown his ignorance and racist acts in the past as well as the present. He is so obsessed with what his predecessor has done to make this country a better place for all humanity that now his main goal is to destroy all that the first African American president has done.

Although it may look bleak from the perspective of those who see the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships in the black church, there is “The God Factor.” One songwriter penned these words, “if it had not been for the Lord on our side where would we be?” Social injustice and cultural bias are sins against those who are powerless, therefore it is against our Creator.

God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods.
How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked?
Selah defend the poor and fatherless: Do justice to the afflicted and needy.
Deliver the poor and the needy; free them from the hand of the wicked”
(Ps. 82:1-4 NKJV).

I am encouraged about what we have accomplished in this demonstration project in our work toward turning the tide in marriage and relationships in the black church. The project, “The Shift from a Decline to Stabilization as it Relates to African American Men in Marriage and Relationships in The Black Church,” has yielded some promising results that we have to establish an ongoing ministry that will include seminars, educational workshops, and marriage counseling to our membership.

The Challenge

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free (Gal. 5: 1 NKJV)! “We are liberated and free to love.” The challenges that we have as participants of this demonstration project are surmountable. And from what I have already heard, there is hope for each of us to have positive and sustainable relationships. I have several

challenges that I call “healthy choices.” My wife and I go grocery shopping together at least twice a month. We like to buy canned soup for occasions when we want to eat a light meal or whenever we have cold symptoms. Over three years ago, my wife suffered high blood pressure, something I have had for a long time.

She started reading the nutrition facts on the brand of soup we bought and discovered it was high in sodium, which contributes to high blood pressure. Needless to say, we stopped buying that brand. We searched for a canned soup that had less sodium and discovered one-called Healthy Choices. Therefore, the challenge set before you throughout this demonstration project is about making healthy choices. Before I provide you my ingredients to healthy choices in marriages and relationships, let me share with you some sayings of others that may be worth thinking about.

My stay-married secret would probably be exercising good communication not when you have to but all the time. I think if you do that, you kind of just cleanse the situation so there’s no build-up. I think that’s probably the best way to do it. (Guy Fieri)

The greatest marriages are built on teamwork, a mutual respect, a healthy dose of admiration and a never-ending portion of love and grace. (Fawn Weaver)

And if love be madness may I never find sanity again. (John Mark Green)

Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies. (Aristotle)

You can’t stop loving or wanting to love because when it’s right, it’s the best thing in the world. When you’re in a relationship and it’s good, even if nothing else in your life is right, you feel like your whole world is complete. (Keith Sweat)

Let me make a comment on what Keith Sweat said, because it reminds me of when I found love after a long and difficult period in my life after my divorce. Some time ago, before I retired from my job as a Train Inspector for the MTA, I was in the process of inspecting a train in the receiving yard and was not aware of anyone observing me in

the process. When other inspectors were in the office writing our reports, one of the inspectors whom I have known for many years said to everyone in the office, “You should have seen Harris today walking down the track and smiling all the way.”

Well, when you have been through a lot and some of the people know your struggle, they can sense your pain as well as your joy.

I probably was thinking about the beautiful relationship that I was enjoying with the lovely woman I was dating. Yes, it is a fact, even if nothing else in your life is right, you feel that the whole world is complete.

Ricardo Montalban said, “True love doesn’t happen right away; it’s an ever-growing process. It develops after you’ve gone through many ups and downs when you suffered together, cried together, laughed together.”

Now, let me continue on the healthy choices and the ingredients that I believe are necessary for healthy marriages and relationships. Healthy choices in relationships have their focus on the good and benevolence of each other and not on role playing that is based on prescribed and presumptuous ideologies that are hierarchy devised.

Paul said to the Galatians, “for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6). Faith is the first ingredient in my bowl of healthy choices for marriage and relationships.

Yes, faith working through love. When I knew that my wife was the one who God had for me, I didn’t have to know everything about her, nor did I have any worries about what I did not know or what I would know of the past, present and the future. Augustine said: faith is to believe what we do not see. The reward of this faith is to see what we believe. In Hebrews 11:1 we read: “now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the

evidence of things not seen.” Faith in God sees the invisible, believes the incredible, and receives the impossible. When you put the ingredients of faith in your marriage and relationships, you are saying, I believe in that person’s commitment to me; therefore, I can walk in that promise by faith. In almost twenty-five years of marriage, I have never been disappointed of the faith I expressed in my commitment to my wife, but I have been rewarded far more than I could ever dream of.

My challenge to each and every one of you taking in this sermon is to walk by faith and not by sight and to know that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6).

Faith in man answers to grace in God. As such, it affects the whole of man’s nature. It commences with the conviction of the mind based on adequate evidence; it continues in the confidence of the heart or emotions based on the above conviction, and it is crowned in the consent of the will, by means of which the conviction and confidence are expressed in conduct.⁴⁶

My second ingredient for healthy choices for marriages and relationships is “trust.”

Without trust in your relationship, you don’t have a relationship, but rather you have at best insecurities that will only keep you captive on negative thoughts and actions that question the integrity of your partner. *Partners who trust God are partners who can be trusted.* For the most part, trust in a relationship is a given. Falling in love with someone brings with it a strong element of trust. However, that trust is tried through trials and adversities and the capacity to keep true to your words and actions. Tell the truth at all times. It will set you free. Never lie about where you have been, where you are going

⁴⁶ W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology: An Introduction to the Thirty-nine Articles*, 6, <http://www.preachershelp.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/griffith-thomas-39-articles.pdf> (accessed December 3, 2019).

and with whom you are going with. Give an honest account of the money you make, spend, and even splurge. You pay a heavy price when trust is betrayed. This is the very thing that leads to insecurities.

One of my favorite scriptures is Proverbs 3:5-6. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” I am sure that if we love God enough and desire to please Him in all that we do, we stand a much better chance at loving and trusting our partners. “Trust the past to the mercy of God, the present to His love, and the future to His providence” (Augustine).

My third ingredient for healthy choices for marriages and relationships is “transparency.” The meaning of transparency is allowing light to pass through so that the objects behind can be distinctly seen. Perhaps, the most important aspect of transparency is that it helps to build interpersonal trust, something, which is absolutely essential for you and your partner to share and collaborate with each other. That means a lack of hidden agendas and conditions, accompanied by the availability of full information required for collaboration, and collective decision-making. Your partner should be able to see transparency in you and not be suspicious of any ulterior motive. Your motives should be crystal clear!

Unconditional love is the last of my healthy choices for marriages and relationships, a very important element. Ironically, this is the only point that prompted some questions during my sermon. I gladly stopped preaching and we had a dialogue on unconditional love. Unconditional love is “agape love” (from the Greek) and that is the love God has for us. It is the highest form of love and charity because unconditional love

means that you actually love someone without expecting anything in return. Agape love sees beyond the cosmetics or outer appearance including faults, failures, and flaws. This kind of love reminds me of a song that the late gospel singer, Andrae Crouch, sang concerning God's love for humankind, "He looked beyond my faults and saw my needs." This is about acceptance and sacrifice and being able to give without expecting anything in return. It is about a commitment to love the other person because you chose to do so.

It is no wonder that questions were raised in this sermon concerning loving our partners in what is called unconditional love. One of the questions was, "How do we get to love someone unconditionally? Is it a process?" I must say this. Apart from a strong relationship with God and the knowledge of His grace, mercy, forgiveness, and unconditional love for us, there is no way we can ascertain in our own strength the possibility of unconditional love.

That is why our number one goal should be to be more like Jesus in our daily lives. So, it is a process that is attainable when we understand what God has done for us through His Son Jesus the Christ. The love that He has for us is not conditional because God is love. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," (John 3:16) and "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8). What I can see in this scripture is that God did not wait for me to change in order for Him to give Himself for me, but He chose to make a way for me first by giving Himself for me upon a cross and dying for me. Even though I did not have any love for Him, He still loved me enough to die for me

upon the cross, therefore demonstrating His unconditional love for me so that I could now be in a place to receive forgiveness.

When I started dating my wife, I had a prayer that I prayed every single day. My prayer was, “Lord help me to love my wife as Christ loved the church.” Although she was not yet my wife, I was looking for her to be my wife, and I wanted to love her like Christ loved the church. I had a good scriptural understanding of how Christ loved the church and it was unconditional love. It was a sacrificial love, and He was willing to give up Himself for the church that he was the head of. He washed her and sanctified it and cared for the church as His own body. And Paul declares that husbands ought to love their wives as Christ loved the church.

There are three forms of love in the Bible and the highest form of love is agape love. God honored my prayer and also placed in my partner’s heart that I was the one for her and she never expressed any fear with her decision to marry me. I was liberated and free to love. I knew exactly the kind of love I wanted in this relationship and it was not going to turn into another empty one that has its roots primarily in a sexual content. Now that brings me to the other forms of love that are expressed in the Greek words *storge*, *eros*, and *phileo*.

***Storge* – Empathy Bond:** This type of love is a bond between kinship. It is a parent-child relationship of which love is naturally expressed through familiarity. There is no disputing the strong bond of *storge* love.

***Eros* – Romantic Love:** *Eros* is named after the Greek god of love and fertility. This kind of love is usually of a sexual content and is romantic, passionate, with sexual desires. This kind of love can be so strong and uncontrollable to the point of the loss of self-control and can result in sex as the main focus of the relationship with very serious

consequences. It is the kind of love that if some of us, like myself, will admit that you at one time in your life had experienced that kind of love? Please don't raise your hand.

That kind of *eros* love can burn hot and bright and full of passion but burn out as quickly as a Supernova. There is an example of this kind of overwhelming lust that is recorded in scripture when David's son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar (Samuel, 13th chapter).

King David himself had shown a lack of sexual restraint when he came to the wife of one of his soldiers, Uriah. Now, Amnon showed a similar lack of restraint when he raped his half-sister Tamar and if you read the entire story, you can sense the evil effects of uncontrollable desire. It all plays out in *eros* love and when he gets his desire fulfilled, he now hates and despises his sister. Later, his brother Absalom had Amnon murdered for how he treated his biological sister. These may be rather extreme examples of *eros* love, yet there are numerous people who have been victimized by the uncontrollable lust for just one moment of pleasure in the name of love. *Eros* love knows no boundaries when it is out to fulfill its sexual desires.

Some of you know exactly what I am talking about because you have been caught up in the moment of a relationship that led to physical encounter before the development of getting to know and respect each other as friends and learning self-discipline and self-control. Allow me to quote this by Ken Boa, unless you think that *eros* love is altogether out of place, which would not be true.⁴⁷

Eros is a vital component of marriage, but it can't sustain a marriage over the long haul. After 12-18 months, you better have something richer and more profound than eros. You also need *phileo* and above all *agape* love.

⁴⁷ Ken Boa, "The Five Loves-And the Greatest of These is Agape," February 14, 2018 <https://kenboa.org/living-out-your-faith/five-loves-greatest-agape/> (accessed December 3, 2019).

All married people can attest to this fact and the words in the traditional marriage vows I can recall is:

Will you take this woman/man to be your wedded wife/husband to live together after God's ordinance in holy estate of matrimony? Will you love her/him, comfort, honor, and keep in sickness and health; and, forsaking all others, keep them only as long as you both shall live?

This far surpasses *Eros* love and embraces the whole spectrum of love, which is *agape*, *storge*, and *phileo*, which we will explore now.

***Phileo* Love:** The next and last love we will talk about is *phileo* love. It is not found in the New Testament but is rather common in human relationships between people who develop friendships and companionships. This kind of love sparks interest between each other due to common interests or shared experiences or a vision, ministry, goals, or insight. Personally, I have developed *Phileo* love with a couple of guys who love to play golf. One is a minister and the other is a deacon and we serve in the same church. We have a relationship with our families, and our wives are also friends with each other. We have *phileo* love for one another. We like the same things and are focused on the same things rather than on each other as with *eros*.

The difference between *storge* love and *phileo* is that we have a choice. *Storge* love is parental. *Phileo* is centered on the highest values like truth, honesty, and goodness. This is why my time with my golf buddies becomes more than a game of golf because we love and serve God and often witness to others about His grace and mercy. Once we went to visit another golfer in the hospital who was critically sick and we prayed with him and shared a scripture to encourage him. Unfortunately, he would pass away that very next morning. We continued to reach out to his family and participated in his celebration of life service.

In addition, take note of this. *Phileo* love is a very important element in our marriages as well. Marriage would not be as God designed it without *phileo* love. The dating process is important because it allows you to get to know each other and cultivate common interests so that there are other variables in your relationship and this keeps your relationship from becoming stagnant or predictable. This is the reason marriage and relationships need to complement each other. A good marriage and relationships do not have to have shared or the same interests because that can become monopolist or boring. The common interests my wife and I had before our marriage were church, family, good music, theaters and shows, and dining out. We still enjoy the same things but not always with each other because we can enjoy those things with family and friends as well. There are times she can enjoy her family and spend time away with them, and I can also go to conferences or be away with my side of the family and we are at ease with it as well as happy that we can enjoy ourselves. There has never been a time where we needed the presence of each other during times of sickness and grief that we were not available for each other.

When distorted, *phileo* can be a world of “insiders and outsiders,” as C. S. Lewis describes so well in his essay, “The Inner Ring.” Friendships can be a source of pride-evoking jealousy, envy, and other sinful attitudes, a downside to the fact that it is a love of choice (unlike the humbler *storge*).

Let me conclude by reiterating a couple of sayings and a scripture concerning the highest form of love, which is *agape* love. “Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity” (Colossians 3:14). “He gave us more and better than we

deserved, and He now calls and equips us to give others better than they deserve.”⁴⁸

Agape transforms relationships, because even if it’s not reciprocated, it doesn’t destroy us.”⁴⁹ Yes! We are liberated and free to love when we can understand what love is and how it applies in our lives.

Also, with knowledge of the dominant culture that insist that their ways are the only acceptable way to marriages and relationships based on role playing and hierocracy, you can reject that kind of thinking. We must critically analyze the social and cultural forces influencing the lives of African Americans. We must push pass that now that we have learned that it does not fit into our culture. When we know better, we can do better. My wife said to me before we got married, “Let’s make a deal, whoever gets home from working first will cook dinner.” I said that that was fine with me. I never thought that I would be cooking dinner for us for twenty-five years, since I arrived home first most of the time. Because of that deal we made (or I was tricked into), I have honed my cooking skills to include a variety of meals, and I have become a better cook.

Let me share this with you. I am a eulogist for a local funeral home and the majority of people I eulogize, I do not know personally. Recently, I was asked by a woman to eulogize her husband. I called her and gave her my condolences and asked her to share with me something about her husband. She emailed me this information about her husband,

Rev. Harris, my husband always let me shine, protected me, and was strong for me, and I could bounce anything off of him. I know there is something in the Bible about a man who looks out for his wife. My husband went about doing good things long before we were married and

⁴⁸ Ken Boa, “All We Need Is Agapē,” <https://www1.cbn.com/spiritual-life/all-we-need-is-agape> (accessed March 6, 2020).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

up until he passed away. He spoiled me and took joy in it. I cannot remember which book and chapter in the Bible that talks about something similar to our married life, maybe you do? He loved the finer things in life and was raised to work hard to achieve it. He was an affluent and loving and generous soul. For over thirty years, he worked two full time jobs. I often told him that he was the best and most loving husband in the world. I miss him so much in many ways, but God has given me some precious memories of our lives to help soothe my pain in this very difficult time in my life.

Wow! I could not help myself from shedding a few tears. I found the right scripture and story to eulogize this grieving yet strong wife to share with the family and friends at the home going service for her husband. Evidently her husband was “Liberated and Free to Love.” He had no problem with letting his love for his wife BE his main focus. For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. I do not think I am overemphasizing the need for African Americans to push back on social and cultural forces influencing the lives of African Americans. Not long ago, I talked to a young industrious black woman who is also the mother of a seven-year-old son. She got pregnant in her second year of college. She did not let that stop her from finishing college, although she had run up against enough problems that would have defeated so many others from their goal of attaining a college degree.

This incredible young mother graduated with a degree in electrical engineering and was offered a job by one of the most prestigious technology companies in the world. The job offer was a long distance in another state, from where she lived near her supportive family. She did not let that deter her. She took her son and they relocated to that state not knowing anyone. Against all odds, she not only found a good community to live in; she also found day care and later a great school for her son’s education.

This young woman was strong and determined to provide for herself and her son no matter what came her way, and she was not going to allow the mistakes of the past to stop her from pursuing her dreams. She has been on her job less than three years and has already been promoted twice. When her lease was coming to an end, she opted to purchase her own house. There were those in her family who thought she was moving too fast but she did it anyway even as she admitted to having some trepidation. Well, the move turned out to be a good investment and she is doing just fine.

I recently had a rather lengthy conversation with her concerning dating and relationships. She is an outgoing person who loves to socialize and date. However, she admits that it is a difficult process with her because her son is her first priority. She has dated a few men and nothing serious has become of it. She talks about how the last person that she dated might have been a possibility, but he proved not to be the one mainly because of what I am preaching on now and that is, we must be “liberated and free to love.” We cannot continue to allow tradition and role-playing to obstruct our marriages and relationships because “for in Christ, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.”

The problem that this young lady had with the young man who she was dating was that he often disrespected her time. Since she is a single mother, she must make arrangements with someone to take care of her son. She said to me that most of the time, when they made a date to meet at a certain place, he was late and that he had little regard that she was paying someone to take care of her son. Second, whenever he met her at her home, there was a limited amount of time because she had a standard that no date would be staying overnight out of respect for herself and her son. Also, he seemed to have been

intimidated by her accomplishments, like her beautiful house, promotions on her job, and her overall ambitions in life. Now get this! He sat on her couch and told her that only one person wears the pants in his house. Needless to say, she knew that relationship did not have a future, so it ended.

Thank God this young lady knows who she is and has learned from her mistakes in the past and is determined to raise her son and teach him that he is someone special to her. She will not let anyone interfere with her goals and dreams in life and believes that eventually the right relationship will come.

Our goals for this entire demonstration project have been to help us build strong marriages and relationships through the seminar, workshop, and now the preached word. As we draw closer to the conclusion of this sermon, let us look at our progress and others who are out to bring African American marriages and relationships back to a place where there is honor and respect and where men are “liberated and free to love.” Therefore, there is no need for role playing because love is the dominant factor.

We (my site team and me) have developed this Demonstration Project to challenge African American men and women in our church that to have healthy marriages and relationships, you must put God first and foremost in your relationship. So, with a site team that consists of seven members and thirty participants, we set out on this journey to make a change in our church and that mission was accomplished. All of our goals were completed in a timely manner. But before I give you the details on how our participants responded to our challenge, let me share with you some information from others who have been researching this same dilemma of the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships in the black church. Through research, I have found

that other churches and organizations have been studying this decline for years and have come out with their solutions to this decline. We can't reinvent the wheel, but perhaps what we can do is add something to it.

I did mention in our setting and a few other times, that our church has never had a ministry for marriage. Our participants in this Demonstration Project have strongly suggested that we form this ministry because it will help marriages and relationships since they were certainly helped. I have found through my research that only three percent of black churches have designated marriage ministries, as presented by W. Bradford Wilcox, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, in an event on "Marriage Movement and the Black Church."⁵⁰

I cannot help but think that if only three percent of black churches have marriage ministries in place, we can improve greatly in our quest for sustainable marriages and relationships in our churches by making this ministry a priority in our churches. The overall consensus of our participants is that we need this ministry and we need it now. Remember, to be liberated and free to love is to have knowledge and understanding of what God expects of us in our marriages and relationships and how we need to love and respect each other and not allow role playing or hierarchy to impede our marriages and relationships.

I read another article by W. Bradford Wilcox and Nicholas H. Wolfinger in *The Atlantic*, dated Feb. 28, 2016, entitled, "How the Church Helps Black Men Flourish in

⁵⁰ Brookings Institution, "Marriage Movement and the Black Church."

America.”⁵¹ The article talks about the structure it provides, along with the values it instills, how it strengthens employment prospects, family life, and more.

I thought there was a lot of veracity in what they said, because in our congregation, we have a number of ministries for men and they are doing well in our church and the community. What this article is saying is black men who are religious and are churchgoers are more likely to get married than their peers who rarely go to church. They are most likely to be gainfully employed and have moral values, attend Bible studies and are involved in their communities and have a commitment to social justice. Now I am glad that our church has a male choir, men’s Bible study, the fishermen’s fellowship, men’s retreat, and men are incorporated in many other ministries as well as being deacons and trustees.

But this was not addressing the decline in marriages and relationships in our church, nor could it because there was not a ministry to address this problem. I have often thought about the decline of African American men in marriages and relationships for many years and I only wished that something would be done about it because it affects the entire family in so many negative ways. Therefore, this opportunity afforded me to pursue the Doctor of Ministry degree, which was my best option.

The shift from a decline to stabilization as it relates to marriage and relationships in the black church – that is our subject. What I now can see, that I only imagined before, is the reality that we were able to help our participants in their marriage and relationships, and real possibility of ongoing marriage ministry that will stabilize the decline in our

⁵¹ W. Bradford Wilcox and Nicholas H. Wolfinger, “How the Church Helps Black Men Flourish in America,” *The Atlantic*, February 28, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/02/soul-mates-black-church-marriage/470760/> (accessed December 1, 2019).

church. When we learn how marriage and relationships should be according to God's plan and are willing to put the necessary work, prayer, and sacrificial love into it, then marriage can be successful.

So, the apostle Paul said to the Galatians: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5: 1). It is my prayer that not only what I had shared with you in this sermon, but what the late Rev. Dr. Johnnie McCann shared in both the seminar and the educational workshop, will indeed continue to help us be better partners in our marriages and relationships, therefore setting an example of what faith in God and love for each other that is demonstrated to the world. Let us review the three goals briefly and then I will be finished and the series of events that you signed up for will be completed.

The first goal of Biblical Covenant Theology was covered by Rev. Dr. Johnnie McCann in the seminar. The question was: Could the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships, as it relates to the black church, be the result of a broken covenant with God? I cannot help but think about Dr. McCann's opening illustration of the seminar, when he drew the triangle that represented earth on the bottom, which is the widest part of a triangle that represents falling humanity and our lives apart from God. On the right side of the triangle leading upwards and getting narrower as it travels towards the pinnacle, he wrote the word "man," and on the opposite side of the triangle, he wrote the word "woman." At the narrowest point of the pinnacle, he wrote 'God' in heaven.

Dr. McCann told us that the best marriages and relationships are when we seek God first and, in our quest to do that, we will become closer to each other. The bottom line is, apart from a relationship with God in heaven, our earthly relationships are not

going to be what God intends for it to be apart from Him. So now, you can reflect back to all the teaching of Dr. McCann in the seminar and it will bless you in your marriage and relationships.

The second goal was Theological: Forgiveness and Reconciliation, and was covered by Rev. Dr. Johnnie McCann in the educational workshop. The questions were: How does the theory of forgiveness leading to reconciliation apply to marriage and relationships? What theological voices can empower married couples to recognize the covenantal underpinnings of their relationships? There is a possibility that even the most damaged marriage relationship can be restored if you are willing to remember what made you fall in love with your partner in the first place and then be willing to forgive and work hard at being the partner that you were at the beginning. “Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first” (Rev. 2:5a NASB). There is a plethora of information and stories, theological and practical, that you can read to help your marriage and relationship be what God intends for it to be.

The last goal, Sociological-Cultural-Environmental of The Preached Word was covered in my sermon. What social behaviors and cultural changes contribute to the decline of African American men as it relates to the black church? My text was taken from Galatians 5: 1-6), and the subject was “I Am Liberated and Free to Love.” There are some things that contribute to the decline of African American men and women that the other dominant culture has done that we have little control over. Remember when I talked about the crisis in this sermon and I stated that there is a difference between personal sins and structural sins.

Structural sins are social in nature and rooted in traditionalism and role-playing. Structural sins are that which are done against you to keep you in bondage to the ideologies of others more powerful than you. Structural sins are racism, sexism, inequality, and poverty. And those are just a few! Racism refers to the combination of power to dominate by one race over other races or ethnic groups that are grounded in the historical assumption and prejudice that a particular race is innately superior to the other.

Now with the knowledge we have gained through what we have learned, we will fight against those forces that have kept us in bondage! “Stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. For in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love” (Gal. 5: 1-6 NKJV).

- No more role-playing because “I’m liberated and free to love.”
- No more trying to dominate my partner through hierarchy and sexism “I’m free and liberated to love.”
- No more copying traditional roles that were never designed for me, but for the dominant culture, “I’m liberated and free to love.”
- I pledge to be the best partner that God intended for me to be, through Christ Jesus who is the head of the church and gave Himself up for it that He might sanctify it and present it to the Father, a church without spot or wrinkle.
- I am liberated and free to love and it’s through love I will serve!

Amen! May God bless you all and thank you so much for being a part of this Demonstration Project.

CHAPTER 5 MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

As Rev. Harris' advisor and site team member, there are six (6) instruments the team and I have evaluated and are comfortable in expressing the candidate's ministerial competency as support of his dissertation.

- 1) **Leader** – Rev. Harris often creates an atmosphere of hope, motivation and encouragement when called upon to share his many gifts of the Spirit in the church and during the Doctor of Ministry Project. When Brother Roger is asked to provide the congregational prayer, he always brings a sense of warmth, love and acceptance of what will be will be as he prays for others. His ability to communicate the needs of others proves he is listening to his church family. Rev. Harris consistently expresses a willingness to learn, show respect for the talents and abilities of others and receives constructive criticism well.
- 2) **Religious Educator** – Rev. Harris takes his time to communicate religious concepts and challenges when teaching different age groups. You can tell he had taken on the responsibility to rightly divide the Word of GOD to ensure he is prepared to expound appropriately to others to help them work towards healing, reconciliation and an individual's personal growth.
- 3) **Counselor** – Rev. Harris is deeply concerned with the state of our church family and community worldwide. His approachable demeanor often lets others feel free to tell Roger their most guarded concerns where he can then offer his open, honest and genuine thoughts in accordance to GOD's Word so the healing and restoration processes can start in that individual's life.

- 4) **Evangelist** – Rev. Harris is so profound in this instrument that many other evangelists refer to him as their evangelist. Brother Roger proclaims the good news by extending the fundamental message of faith beyond the immediate boundaries. He goes out to churches, conferences, community events, prisons, schools and other places where people are gathered to share the Word of GOD. His effective style of bearing witness to his trust in GOD enables others to confess their sins and seek GOD's grace and mercy.
- 5) **Administrator** – Rev. Harris continues to develop his skills by strategizing how to handle challenging situations by seeking effective and realistic goals to ensure all that will be affected are supported in the decisioning process.
- 6) **Technology/ Social Media Management** – Rev. Harris continues to embrace technology by incorporating media tools in his ministry such as presentations, video productions and posting encouraging messages on Facebook and other social media outlets.

We believe Rev. Harris has the established instruments and an enthusiastic willingness to learn new tools in enhance his ministry and we can wait see what GOD will do with him next.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Proposal

THE SHIFT FROM A DECLINE TO STABILIZATION AS IT RELATES TO
AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN IN MARRIAGE AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE
BLACK CHURCH

By

ROGER L. HARRIS, SR.

New York Theological Seminary

September 15, 2018

CHALLENGE STATEMENT

As an associate Pastor of Canaan Baptist of Christ in Harlem, NY, I am concerned with the continuous decline of African American men in marriage and relationships in the Black Church. This demonstration project will find ways to build positive relationships and strong marriages, thereby strengthening the church, through seminars, educational workshops and the preached word.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

Since 1932, Canaan Baptist Church of Christ in Harlem, New York has been a beacon of light, shining brightly across the globe, bringing hope to weary travelers in search of truth. The hand of God has worked mightily within this congregation to bring Canaan from its humble beginnings, in 1932, to its historic achievements in this present day. It began when a group of 41 souls, committed to the truth of the Gospel, and determined to live for Christ, decided to leave Mt. Moriah Baptist Church. Calling themselves the “Israelite Mission” they formally organized and founded Canaan Baptist on September 26, 1932, led by the first pastor, Rev. Middleton. After the passing of Rev. Middleton, the disciples and their second pastor, Rev. Edward M. Moore, moved to a building on W. 118th Street. The membership grew to the point where they had to move into a larger place. They purchased the former Loews Theater on 116th Street. Shortly after they moved into their new place of worship, tragedy struck their leader and pastor and he passed away suddenly.

After a search for a new pastor that lasted over a year, the congregation voted to have the Rev. Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker as their senior pastor in 1967. Dr. Walker served this congregation for nearly 37 years before he retired in 2004 and became Pastor Emeritus. I will share a plethora of what this gifted servant of God had done and how he put the word “historic” in front of what is now the Historic Canaan Baptist Church of Christ.

In the year 2005, the Canaan family called on the Reverend Dr. Thomas D. Johnson to be the new Senior Pastor, and he is presently serving this congregation and the Harlem community, which has been hard hit by gentrification.

The Ministry, Mission, and the Spirituality of the Congregation

The ministries of the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ seek to use whatever gifts, talents, skills and abilities God has given us to serve Him and the needs of others. The ministries of Canaan seek to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ. Canaan has more than 40 ministries. Our spotlight ministries highlight our most important work.

Christian Education

The mission of the Christian Education Commission is to provide oversight and guidance to all teaching programs within the church:

- (1) To develop a biblically literate congregation;
- (2) To provide on-going training for the church membership and leadership; and
- (3) To develop sound educational objectives for the church membership.

Diaconate Ministry

The Diaconate Ministry is made up of men and women who are ordained Servants of God. They serve the needs of the congregation. They visit the sick and shut-in, serve communion, and are responsible for the greater good. They assist our pastor in the discharge of his responsibilities.

HIV/AIDS Ministry

In response to the growing pandemic of HIV/AIDS in New York, the nation, and the world, the Vivian L. Potter HIV Ministry has accepted the challenge to minister to the infected and affected. Their holistic approach is to provide general education, advocacy,

assistance in obtaining the most recent information, and access to resources and referrals. This is undergirded by spiritual support, pastoral care, and Christian education to sensitize the need for awareness and compassion within the church and the worldwide community.

Missionary Ministry

Missionaries are to be the presence of Christ in the world. Their mission is to evangelize, spreading the gospel throughout the world. The Missionary Ministry accomplishes this through intercessory prayer, visitation, scripture reading, food distribution, educational workshops, and donations of clothing and money.

Music Ministry

In the African American religious experience, music plays a very important part in the worship service. The significance of our music is rooted in the history of the slave experience in America. Our ancestors, as slaves, sang spirituals to keep them spiritually connected to the God they prayed to. Music was a way of survival.

Canaan's Music Ministry is vibrant and uplifting. It consists of spirituals, hymns, gospel, anthems, and prayer and praise team ensembles to warm up the congregation and lift everyone to their feet in praise of an awesome God. Each Sunday you will hear the amazing voices of either the Canaan Mass Choir, the Male Chorus, the Sanctuary Choir, the Silver Strands, the Voices of Canaan, (VOC), the Wyatt Tee Walker (WTW) Inspirational Chorus, the Young Adult Ministry (YAM) Choir or the Church School Choir, accompanied by a full spectrum of musicians.

Youth Ministry

The mission of the Youth Ministry is to win the souls of young people of all ages. This is why we have provided a Church School every Saturday from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. The ages served are from 5 to 17 years old. The young people are taught the word of God, and those who need tutorial help are assisted in our Robert Francis Learning Center. Our students also learn how to participate in the youth worship service that is designed for them every second Sunday of the month. They preside, read the scripture, and lead in prayer and singing. The youth are also taken to cultural events that take place in various parts of our city and state.

Ushers Ministry

The Ushers provide the initial introductions to the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ worship experience by greeting our disciples, visitors and friends. The Ushers, represented by persons of all ages, exhibit both dedication and experience as they assist with the orderly conduct of our worship service.

Young Adults Ministry

The Young Adults Ministry's mission is to praise and glorify God, as well as gain an understanding of God's word and teachings as they apply in our lives; to provide an open forum where young adults can meet regularly to discuss the various spiritual issues their age group faces; to provide support and fellowship while keeping in the work of the Lord; to motivate one another to maintain their walk of faith and continue to glorify God in all that they do; and to be a social group of positive influence providing guidance and direction towards a life of purpose and self-discovery.

Social Action Commission

Bringing about social justice is a part of the Christian duty. God expects the church to speak out against injustice and inequity in the world and to work to bring justice to the oppressed. The Social Action Commission is a non-partisan, issue-oriented, multi-faceted ministry, whose primary objective is to be an effective Church and community organizing catalyst.

The mission of the Social Action Commission is to heighten the awareness of the church and community regarding social action issues, to increase awareness around socio-political issues, and to empower our disciples to speak truth to power, in faithful service to our rich history and legacy as a church of social justice.

Our Other Ministries

Worship

Commission on Evangelism

Dance the Word

Deaf Ministry

Prayer and Praise Ministry

Pulpit Aid

Fellowship

Basketball Ministry

Birthday Ministry

Single Parents Ministry

Church School Choir

Fishermen's Fellowship

New Disciples Ministry

Service

Audio/Media Ministry

Caretakers Ministry

Culinary Ministry

Hosts and Hostesses Ministry

Official Board

Publication Ministry

Education

Adult Literary Ministry

Baptist Training Union (BTU)

Bible Study

Church School

Robert Francis Learning Center

Scholarship and Career Development Commission

Social Services

Bethesda Counseling and Wellness Services

Housing Services

Lydia Project

Prison Ministry

Senior Services Center

Vivian L. Potter HIV Ministry

This is very much an overview of the Ministry and Mission of the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ so let me briefly elaborate on the *spirituality of the congregation* as I see it. The members of Canaan have been blessed with pastors and ministers over the years who are called to the ministry and are seminary trained. They preach with passion, knowledge, and with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. I serve as Pastor of Evangelism with a vision to reach out to a cross-cultural community due to gentrification in the Harlem Community. I also follow up on those who become new disciples. I am actively engaged in every aspect of the pastoral ministry in this church as well as the community.

The church is engaged in biblical studies as well as prayer meetings, which help the congregation in their spiritual growth where their spirituality is challenged not only in the church but in the world they live in. The awareness of their spirituality is shown in their testimony of how God made a way for them in times of need. some way or another.

Canaan Baptist Church of Christ has experienced changes over the years, but the ministry, mission, and spirituality have not changed. As I mentioned at the beginning of this profile, the Rev. Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker was the person who thrust this church forward and it became a model for ministry throughout this city.

On March 24, 1968, the iconic Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. installed Rev. Dr. Wyatt T. Walker as Senior Pastor of Canaan Baptist Church.

Canaan's legacy as a church of social action brought some of the greatest preachers and dignitaries in the world to our pulpit, including Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Sr., Rev. Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor, Rev. Dr. Gardner C. Taylor, Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr., Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright, Jr., South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu,

Rev. Jesse Jackson, and Rev. Al Sharpton. Historically, Canaan was Nelson Mandela's first stop on his first visit to the United States as President of South Africa.

After suffering four strokes, the Harlem pastor, theologian, human rights activist, cultural historian, prolific writer, and the nation's foremost authority on the music of the African-American religious experience, retired from Canaan in October 2004. In great appreciation for his dedication, selfless service, and inspired leadership, the church conferred on Dr. Walker the title of Pastor Emeritus.

In 2005, the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ called the Rev. Dr. Thomas D. Johnson to lead the church and he is still leading Canaan. He is an excellent preacher and teacher with a lot of experience in ministry. However, being the successor to Wyatt Tee Walker is a large task and it would have been for most any pastor that followed him. Some of the members' expectations were just unrealistic and when they were faced with the fact that he was not a "second coming" of Dr. Walker, they left Canaan. There was a lot of disharmony in the church that included some members of the official board. The church lost a large number of members, which affected the church's budget. But the loss of membership had to do not only with the change in leadership, but also the onset of gentrification. This has not only impacted our church but many churches in Harlem as well.

I would like to see the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ become more cross-cultural. To become a cross-cultural church will not only mean that we must adopt a new method of evangelism, but the leadership must be willing to accept changes that will challenge some of their fears that have already been expressed. According to the demographics that have been prepared for Canaan Baptist Church of Christ by the

Precept Group that deals within a 3.0-mile radius of our church, Anglos now make up 37% of the population, followed by Hispanics at 34%, and African Americans 19%.

Through gentrification, the African American churches have lost membership because there is not enough affordable housing. Our church has a line of over 100 visitors from all over the world who fill our balcony every Sunday. What I have found out as Pastor of Evangelism is that, in this line are people who live in the Harlem community. Some church officials fear that if they become a part of our church, they will try and take it over. One of our officials said to me they can join, but not as members of the official board.

Our church has two escalators that carry people up to a large area that is called **Founders Hall**. In Founders Hall, there are portraits of all the founding members from 1932 that includes some members who are still living. Founders Hall is where we hold banquets, plays, and other large events.

We also have a place on the first floor called **Liberation Tower**, where the pastors, official board, and the choir meet and have prayer before we enter into the sanctuary for our Sunday morning service.

On the second floor, we have one of the most important artifacts on display that tells the story of the history of the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ. It is the original pulpit and it speaks about the various men and women of God who, over the 86 years of the history of our church, proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ for the salvation of our souls, as well as spoke truth to the powers that be. I already mentioned the names of many iconic people who stood behind that pulpit and spoke to our congregation. There are so many others from around this world who spoke from this pulpit that I will not

mention, but there is a name I cannot leave out and that is myself, and I am glad that I had that opportunity.

The Programs that Best Represent the Congregation's Ministry, Mission and Spirituality

The programs that best represent our ministry are our Sunday morning worship service and Sunday school; Wednesday prayer and preaching services at 1:00 PM and 7:00 PM; Thursday Bible study; Saturday church school; Senior citizen center from Monday to Friday; and Senior Housing (2 four story buildings). In addition to these, those that best represent the mission include the nursing home, prison ministry, social action commission, Lydia project, and the sacrificial offering to feed the hungry and provide clothing and shelter. Our disciples often find spirituality in worship and service to the Lord that includes prayer and meditation.

The Programs that Demonstrate the Weakness of the Congregation

In my opinion, it is the afternoon Sunday services that happen a few times a year like the fall anniversary of ministries, the dedication of officers, as well as the fall revival. They can and should be incorporated into the Sunday morning service. The afternoon services are poorly attended.

Identity

Tradition

The Canaan Baptist Church follows a tradition that is rooted in the southern culture more than northern. The disciples of Canaan from its early beginnings were from the south and that is still prevalent today. It is a certain style of singing, praying, testifying, and preaching. They love songs that tell their story. "Down through the years

the Lord's been good to me, He put food on my table, a roof over my head." They still enjoy those old songs.

Our Deacons still invoke in their prayers the traditional prayers heard in the old southern church, "and when our journey is over down here, give us a place in heaven." The testimony still rings out a southern sound of where the Lord brought me from. The preaching is still appreciated with a whoop at the end.

Canaan Baptist Church of Christ is also traditional in its Sunday morning attire. The preachers wear robes; the deacons have a dress code on first Sundays; and the trustees who are women wear hats. Missionaries also wear white on the first Sundays. Our style of worship is more traditional, probably more so than I would like it to be. The choir still processions into the choir stand. We repeat the Affirmation of Faith; after the general tithes and offering, we stand and sing, "All things come of thee"; and after the scripture is read, we stand up and sing, "Glory to the Father". Every first Sunday, which is communion Sunday, we stand and read a rather lengthy Church Covenant.

Canaan Baptist Church of Christ are members of the Progressive National Baptist Convention and is involved in the local, state, regional, and national meetings. Our church, with its tradition, still has enough of new ministries to be of help to some who love the praise and worship style as well as a dynamic praise dance ministry. There are no tensions between the congregation's local history and its wider tradition.

Ethos

The disciples of our church have a healthy sense of their past struggles in a society (past and present) who have to be constantly reminded that we are somebody. Our ancestors were slaves in a strange land and stripped of their humanity, identity, and

dignity, and subjected to the worst kind of brutality and cruelty that an evil mind can conceive. After the liberation from slavery, came the birth of Jim Crow, a caste system of White supremacy that made African Americans second-class citizens. They went from exploitation to marginalization of Black people.

In opposition to constant injustice by Jim Crow, a movement came to fruition known as the Civil Rights Movement led by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and this is the ethos of the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ. We are a prophetic community with social action as its core, and we model from the scripture that Jesus stood up in the Synagogue and quoted Isaiah the prophet (Luke.4: 18).

Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker, my pastor and friend, passed away on January 24, 2018 at his home in Chester, Virginia, at the age of 88. He was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Chief of Staff, and the main strategist for the August 28, 1963 March on Washington DC, as well as many other important events in the civil rights movement. Those who I already mentioned who stood behind the pulpit and proclaimed the prophetic word of God that spoke truth to power tell the stories about the model of the Canaan congregation.

The church's beliefs and values are our personal salvation, sacrament, and symbols that can be seen throughout the community (e.g., the 2 Senior Citizens apartment buildings and affordable housing). Also, when we pass by the places where we do ministry, they remind us of our calling to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and those that are in prison. Jesus declared in Matthew 25, that as you have done it to the least of my people, you did it unto me.

Canaan Baptist Church of Christ has a ritual in almost all of its meetings, whether business or programs. Before the start of the meeting, you must read a scripture and pray.

Those who want to become members of Canaan must attend our new discipleship classes. If you are a leader, or want to be one, you must be a tither. We are a tithing congregation; we emphasize tithes and offerings and each member gets a box of envelopes.

Context

Canaan Baptist Church of Christ has over 700 members, 98% of whom are African Americans. Adult women make up more than 73%, adult men 18%, and children about 9%. The average age of the congregation is 56 years. Income averages around \$67,000 (middle class). Over 36% of Canaan's members have college degrees or higher.

Canaan is equipped to service those who are deaf and those with other types of disability. The deaf ministry is available during our worship services. Not only do we distribute a weekly bulletin to keep our members informed, but we also make use of our wide screen monitors that are visible for all our congregation. We provide CDs and DVDs for those who would like to purchase a copy of our recorded Sunday morning service, and those who cannot attend service can livestream it. Our church is open seven days a week.

The senior pastor is the CEO of our church. He has an official board that includes deacons, trustees, and the president of the congregation. The pastoral staff has twelve ordained ministers who assist the senior pastor and three ministers in training. There are eight women and seven men on our pastoral staff. I have already reflected on the theological issues but let me state this again. We put emphasis on prophetic religion and there is no doubt that it will continue.

I have served in the ministry of this church as youth pastor, pastor of evangelism, and now on the Canaan senior citizens board that is community-oriented. I have been faithful throughout my ministry in this church and have the trust of the people, Senior

Pastor, as well as the Official Board. On June 30th, I celebrated fifty years in ministry since my ordination. The only thing that is at stake for me is to finish my course, which I set out on in this tedious journey to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and to reach my goal to earn the Doctor of Ministry Degree from New York Theological Seminary.

This completes the Profile of the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ in Harlem, NY.

CHAPTER 2 - PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE

There is a crisis in the African American church concerning the men as it relates to relationships and marriages. This notable decline has to be addressed in our church for the sake of the gospel we preach that is able to change sinners to saints. Surely, this includes living in peace with the people we love in sustainable relationships.

I have been in active ministry in my church for many years, and we had a vibrant and strong single ministry long before I arrived here, but it is now inactive, not due to the lack of single women but the lack of single men. Marriages are a rare occurrence. It is not because men and women do not have relationships, but because these relationships are not sustainable.

There are women and men in our church who would prefer to be in a relationship that may lead to marriage, but it is difficult for them to find suitable companionship. The decline of African American men in the Black church has been an ongoing issue for many decades, but have we accepted this without an ongoing challenge in the face of fractured families and the church for which Jesus died for and established?

Let me share an article from the Brookings Institution. With marriage rates declining sharply within the African-American community, the Brookings Institution assembled a panel of ministers, policymakers, sociologists, and community leaders to discuss the problem and determine what role, if any, black churches could play in strengthening the institution.

Although Americans have retreated from marriage in recent years, the trend is most pronounced among blacks. Marriage rates have steadily declined over the past forty years, nearly seven of ten black children are born to unmarried mothers, and roughly 85 percent of black children are expected to spend some or all of their childhood in a single-parent family.¹

“We are seeing a sea-change in African-American life that cannot continue, or we will not continue as a viable people,” Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC.) said. “It’s impossible to overestimate what has happened to our community in only a single generation or two, or what might happen to the next generation if it continues at this pace.”²

Panelists agreed that marriage carries both economical and spiritual benefits, and serves as a cornerstone for relationships and communities. Brookings Senior Fellow Ron Haskins presented evidence suggesting that marriage reduces poverty by 27%. In addition, he noted that marriage affects physical and mental health, education levels, and incarceration rates. “There is no question that if we increase marriage rates, we will have a very substantial impact on poverty and we would also have impacts on children’s development and the lives of adults,” Haskins said.³

I suspect that the relational problem with Black men may require systemic change because of who Black men are perceived to be, rather than who they really are. The

¹ “Event Summary: Marriage Movement and the Black Church.” *Brookings.edu*. June 2, 2004. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/event-summary-marriage-movement-and-the-black-church/> (accessed April 8, 2018).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

definition of Black men in America by White people dating back to slavery and to the present Black Lives Matter Movement says a lot about the stigmatization of Black men for four hundred years. It is hard for me to believe that it has no systemic effect on the psychology of Black men. I will have more to say about this later and what my research revealed concerning the systemic effects on Black men.

I am excited about my expected outcome of this project because it will help build more sustainable relationships. Through the knowledge we gain during participation in seminars, educational workshops, and the preached word, participants will find solutions to sustainable relationships and marriages.

I believe this project and the process that we are taking will help change the negative thoughts and words that are so often expressed by men and women to each other that cause resentment and barriers to rise. When barriers are removed, the relationship has a better chance of becoming sustainable because men and women learn to express themselves and what they want and need in a relationship.

The resources that we need to address this challenge are attainable because they are within the Site Team. The church will provide some financial help and the facilities for our workshop and preached word. The facilitators and professionals needed and the cost of their services have already been addressed.

The target group who are the participants are the key to success, so we have invested in them from the inception of the Demonstration Project, starting with the interviews. The information they give in the interviews determine what type of workshop will be needed to address their concerns. They are the challenge.

There is no conflict of interest in the Site Team or the target group.

CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Biblical: Covenant Theology

Could the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships as it relates to the Black church be due to a broken covenant with God?

¹³ “This is ^[a]another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the ^[b]offering or accepts *it* with favor from your hand. ¹⁴ Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. (Malachi 2:13-14, NASB)

A covenant has been God’s way of conveying His will to His chosen people. There are at least seven covenants in the Hebrew Scriptures. In essence, a covenant is a contract between two parties that is established before God as a witness, a contract whose permanence is ultimately safeguarded by none other than God Himself.

In a sense, marriage is a covenant. It is entered into by the husband and wife before God as a witness. Could the decline of African American men in marriage and relationships as it relates to the Black church be due to a broken covenant with God? I suspect that this is the case, so we will explore covenant theology and the marriage covenant according to the scriptures. This question will be explored as it relates to (Mal. 2:14). Although this is a difficult text to interpret, there is no doubt it reflects a broken covenant in relationship to God. In Malachi, in contrast to Ezra and Nehemiah, we see

how a prophet approached the same issues on marriage. For the prophet, marriage with foreign women, infidelity and divorce were above all else violations of the fundamental covenantal bonds of the community.

Although many of the details of this passage are obscure, The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary emphasizes how consistently Malachi roots his discussion of marriage within the framework of a community that shares a fundamental relationship based on a common father and creator.

Thus, marriage has a communal dimension: it is not solely, nor even primarily, an individual act and choice. The larger community has a stake in an individual's choice of a marriage partner, the maintenance of fidelity to the marriage bond, and in what happens when the bond is sundered in divorce.

The letter to the Ephesians (5:22-23) presumes a similar communal dimension when it situates marriage within the broad framework of the relationship between Christ and the church. The marriage relationship is not just a private matter but also rather a family and communal matter, because God is our Father and He has established His covenant with us. When this covenant is broken, it means we have become unfaithful to Him first and foremost.

Theological: "Forgiveness and Reconciliation"

How does the theory of forgiveness leading to reconciliation apply to marriage and relationships? What theological voices can empower married couples to recognize the covenantal underpinnings of their relationships?

Forgiveness and reconciliation has been the theme of New Testament theology especially in the Epistle to the church in Rome. In Romans, Paul speaks of the

righteousness of God and the sinful state of humankind (Ro. 1:17-32), and how to receive forgiveness and reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ who made it possible by His atonement for our sins upon the cross at Calvary (3:23, 6:23, and 10: 9-10).

Forgiveness and reconciliation can only be possible when, (1) The offender recognizes his/her offence; (2) is sorry for the offence; and (3) asked for forgiveness. Then reconciliation is possible. This theological path is the methodology we will pursue to help solve the marriage crisis and issues related to Black men in our church. How does the theory of forgiveness leading to reconciliation apply to marriage and relationships? What theological voices can empower married couples to recognize the covenantal underpinnings of their relationships? This theological concept must be followed in order for African American men and women to shift from decline to stabilization as it relates to marriage and relationships in the Black church.

Sociological Aspect: Cultural-Environmental

What social behaviors and cultural changes contribute to the decline of African American men as it relates to marriage and relationships in the Black church?

The Reverend Leslie Braxton, a senior pastor at Seattle's Mount Zion Baptist Church and a panelist on the Brookings Institution's discussion on Marriage Movement and the Black Church said, "A marriage movement in the black church community has to be a movement to educationally and economically empower black men. The bottom line is that men without stable jobs and men without economic esteem don't marry or don't stay married. The best social program is to give a man a job."⁴

⁴ Ibid.

There were voices of disagreement on this panel that make a viable argument concerning the decline of marriage in the African American community. Not everyone agreed that economics and other external circumstances could completely explain diminishing marriage rates. “Between 1865 and 1965, despite the fact that we endured slavery, Jim Crow, discrimination, ten years of the Depression, no representation in government, the Ku Klux Klan, and no police protection, black marriages flourished,” said National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise Founder and President Robert Woodson. “Don’t tell me external circumstances were responsible for altering that.”⁵

This is a thought that brings me back to the research I did a few years ago when I was writing my thesis for my Master’s Degree titled, “Why Are so Many Men Missing From The African American Family? In the course of that research, I read the Moynihan Report: *The Negro Family: the Case for National Action*, written in 1965 by Daniel Moynihan, then with the Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor.⁶

The Moynihan Report research, done more than fifty years ago, seems to give some veracity to what Robert Woodson of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise claimed in the Brookings Institution event.⁷ Let me share more from what was said by more of the panelists assembled in that event.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Daniel P. Moynihan, *“The Moynihan Report”: The Negro Family, the Case for National Action*. Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor, 1965. <http://www.dol.gov/dol/aboutdol/history/webid-meynihan.htm> (accessed February 15, 2015).

⁷ “Marriage Movement and the Black Church.”

Ronald Mincy, a professor of Social Work Policy and Practice at Columbia University, urged the panelists to be realistic about the ability of the churches to reach those most in need of relationship counseling. Given low church attendance seen in many congregations across the country, Mincy said, “The church is only effective to the extent that it has an effective outreach to African-American men so that they’re there to hear the pulpit when it speaks out on these issues.”⁸ W. Bradford Wilcox, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Virginia-Charlottesville, also presented evidence indicating that only 3 percent of black churches had designated marriage ministries.⁹

These statistics are staggering given the fact that there is a decline in marriage in the black church that has continued for over a generation. This really hits home. I have included more than forty ministries in the profile of my church and not one of them is a ministry designated for marriage and relationships. This has to be addressed now.

Despite these concerns, Diann Dawson, who directs the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Regional Operations, maintained that churches were best positioned to promote marriage. “The marriage movement in America will never be fully realized until we have the full participation and commitment of the black church. The black church is the strongest institution in our community, and the African-American Healthy Marriage Initiative realizes the importance in partnering with

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

the black church to successfully reach the black community on the benefits of marriage.”¹⁰

We will close this on a positive note from Del. Norton. “This is a world in which marriage can thrive again. Somebody has to speak up for marriage. Somebody has to speak up for family. Somebody has to talk some turkey about it. Somebody needs to bring the moral and practical clarity up front about marriage and about what it means to family life and what it has meant about the progress of African-Americans from slavery to today.”¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4 PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

Goal 1: To Develop Awareness of the Urgency of Positive Relationships and Strong Marriages in the Church from a Biblical Perspective through Covenantal Theology.

There are far too many men and women in marriages and relationships in our church who have little or no understanding that marriage is a commitment not just based on feelings and emotions, sexual relations, and financial security, because all of these can change from time to time. Marriage is a Covenant made before God and one must know what He expects in the relationship. Faithfulness is paramount. The decline in marriages and relationships of African American men as it relates to our women in the Black church can shift from decline to stabilization because of a clear understanding of God's Covenant as it relates to marriage. This can bring about systemic change and the seminar will benefit all of our participants.

Strategy 1: My first strategy is to develop with the Site Team a seminar that will help participants understand marriage and relationships through the lenses of covenantal theology. We will personally approach and recruit all of our participants through announcements in the church bulletin.

Strategy 2: The Site Team and I (Roger Harris) will employ the services of ministers and theologians who have experience and knowledge in covenantal theology. My advisor, Rev. Dr. Robert Thompson, will be the person responsible for this task.

Strategy 3: This seminar will take place on January 12, 2019 in our church. Our next strategy is to promote excitement through announcements from the pulpit

by the Senior Pastor and various participants and Site Team members.

Each week leading up to the event, there will be a short skit to raise excitement. We have designated Denise Viaer and Johnny Patterson, who are Site Team members, to be responsible for coordinating this seminar that will include refreshments and lunch.

Evaluation of Goal 1:

The evaluation of this seminar will be important because, from this event, we will determine what needs to be incorporated in the educational workshop and how.

All of our goals and strategies have an evaluation process. We have designated a person who is a professional in this field and is a member of the Site Team, Dr. David Julian Hodges. Dr. Hodges, who is Professor of Anthropology at Hunter College, City University of New York, has agreed to do all of our evaluations.

Goal 2: To develop with the Site Team an educational workshop that addresses the theological question on forgiveness and reconciliation.

“How does the theory of forgiveness leading to reconciliation apply to marriage and relationships?”

I often think of the history of this country where African Americans were held in slavery for almost four hundred years, followed by more than a century of Jim Crow. Can you imagine what the difference would have been if the Government (President/ Congress) would issue a public apology, followed by restitution?

When that happens, then authentic forgiveness and reconciliation can take place. Systemic behavior can be eradicated from African American men as it relates to marriage

and relationships in the Black church when the theological theory of forgiveness and reconciliation is applied to marriage and relationships.

Strategy 1: We will employ ministers and theologians to facilitate the workshop who specialize in marriage and relationships and the theological concept of forgiveness and reconciliation. I will take the responsibility to ensure that we have the right facilitators in place.

Strategy 2: This workshop will take place on March 9, 2019 at one of our church's facilities. This will be an all-day workshop lasting about six hours that will include refreshments and lunch. This workshop will require Site Team leadership as a whole under the leadership of Jean Perry and Anthony Means.

Strategy 3: We will promote this workshop in very much the same way as the seminar with announcements from the pulpit by our senior pastor, participants and Site Team members. Because we now have our core participants, we can call them individually with all the information they need to know.

Evaluation of Goal 2:

The evaluation of the seminar will be a major factor in the way we coordinate the workshop and what is incorporated in the workshop.

We can evaluate the participants on what was learned from the workshop using questionnaire forms.

We have chosen for our method of evaluation the professional method because we have on our Site Team one who is well qualified to assess and

evaluate our goals and strategy. Dr. David Julian Hodges, a Professor of Anthropology at Hunter College, has agreed to serve without charge in that capacity because he is a friend and a long-time member of my church. However, he will be given an honorarium.

Goal 3: To preach a sermon based on how to change the culture and sociological problems that contribute to the decline of African American men as it relates to marriage and the Black church. (Malachi 2:14)

Strategy 1: Get the date approved by the senior pastor with me being the preacher for this occasion. The projected date for this goal is the last Saturday in April 14, 2019. I will be the person responsible for the implementation of this event.

Strategy 2: Announcements from the pulpit and inserts placed into our church bulletin will be done two weeks before this event. Participants will describe their experiences in the educational workshop each Sunday leading up to the service in order to generate excitement.

Strategy 3: The participants will sit in a designated section and will be acknowledged by the senior pastor as to the occasion. Every participant will be asked to take notes or use their recording device. Our Sunday morning service is streamlined as well as recorded so we can assure that every participant can provide feedback of the sermon.

Evaluation of Goal 3:

We will distribute questionnaires to the participants and Site Team members to complete in order to evaluate the sermon and its contents. The sermon will be evaluated as it relates to the goal to change the culture and the sociological

environment that contributes to the decline of African American men as it relates to marriage and relationships in the Black church.

Dr. David Julian Hodges, who is our designated evaluator, will be the person who will implement this process.

CHAPTER 5 - MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

The Process

On March 17, 2018, the Site Team and myself held a meeting that lasted nearly two hours in the Cooper Conference Room of the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ. The meeting was held to evaluate me on the sixteen Ministerial Competencies as it relates to the assessment of my candidacy.

In our February meeting, each Site Team Member had received a copy of the assessment guide for the evaluation and how it is used to evaluate the competence of the candidate. Since I had to first evaluate myself, I will share with you as I did with the Site Team my self-evaluation of the sixteen Ministerial Competencies.

Theologian

Even though I have been actively engaged in the work of a theologian and have experienced some success, I need to continue toward excellence as a theologian.

Preacher/Interpreter of Sacred Texts

I have had the opportunity to preach and interpret the sacred text for many years and I am still amazed at how much I do not know, and how much I need to learn and keep learning. So I must continue to learn.

Worship Leader

In ministry, it is necessary to experience the worship service in many settings. Some are redundant while others are constantly changing to a different setting. So I will continue in my learning experience.

Prophetic Agent

This is an area in ministry that is not only vast but it takes the wisdom of God to adequately address my needs and concerns in this ministry. This means that I will continue to earnestly pursue God's guidance and leading in this ministry.

Leader

Leadership is defined in many ways so that there is no way anyone who is a leader can come to a plateau. There are always heights and depths toward continued excellence.

Religious/Spiritual Educator

I see this competency as an area that I need to develop more because I can see some of the struggles I encountered in the Demonstration Project though it is progress.

Counselor

I am still learning all the nuances and forms of counseling. Learning how to recognize my limits and own competency as a counselor, and to make appropriate referrals when necessary, was a developing process for me.

Pastor

This is one area that I feel the most comfortable with and perhaps the most rewarding in a sense. Visiting those who are sick in hospitals, homes, and those in prison was something I have always done even until now. Learning and understanding self-care was something I found out the hard way. I still continue to aspire to be a good pastor.

Spiritual Leader

I think spiritual leadership goes beyond the boundaries of your religious community or tradition. Wherever you go, whoever you come in contact with on a daily basis ought to sense a spiritual leader in you by the way you act and speak. On my job

and in my community, people see me as a spiritual leader even without them ever going to my church.

Ecumenist

I am seeking to especially develop more in this area because we are a world with so many different faith traditions. If there is a fire on your block, we won't ask what your faith is, but we will seek to put out the fire and save whomever we can. On the block where my church is located, we have a Mosque and we have come together for the good of people and the community and we have had ecumenical services together.

Witness or Evangelist

This has been one of my passions for many years and the fire still burns within me to proclaim the good news. I have served as pastor of evangelism in my church for five years until I committed to the task of pursuing the Doctor of Ministry Degree.

Administrator

I am working to develop more skills as an administrator and I can see some progress. The work I am putting into this Demonstration Project has helped me in so many ways to understand that I must give ownership to this project and that requires administration.

Professional

I have always tried to be professional in the ministry because my mentor was professional. I had the spirit and the heart. However, I needed the educational tools necessary to be a good professional. When we lost our church building in Union City, GA in 2009, I decided to enroll in Ashland Theological Seminary where I received a Diploma in Black Religious Studies. Later, I earned a Master's Degree in Pastoral Care

and Counseling at NYTS in 2015. I am still striving to be more professional in my ministry.

Financial Management

Even though I have understanding of financial management, I need more knowledge on budgeting and especially forecasting. I am a person who is a liberal giver and sometimes to a fault. I need to be more conscious that my situation can change, therefore staying within my budget is wise.

Technology/Social Media Management

Attention! I must make this a priority. Technology and social media are vital to advancement not only in corporations, ministries, but also for personal advancement. I like social media and the Internet, visiting websites, and Google. I have made a commitment to myself to learn as much as I can about technology.

Cultural Proficiency Development

My desire is to develop in the area of cultural proficiency because people of different cultures are neighbors. (There is a saying; he/she who only knows their culture knows no culture.) My seminary experience here at NYTS is a good example of how different cultures can come together and appreciate each other's culture and form strong bonds among each other.

Competencies Chosen for Development

The meeting with the Site Team concerning the comparison of answers was positive and they agreed with the assessment. The two competencies I have chosen are (1) Technology/Social Media and (2) Cultural Proficiency.

My first goal toward technology is to learn how to create my own PowerPoint presentation. I have already had my first lesson on how to do it. This will be completed by December 2018.

My second target competency is Cultural Proficiency. I have purchased a book titled *They Touched My Life* by Robert Rose, Ph.D.¹² This book will help me to better understand cultural proficiency.

Which goals in the Plan of Implementation do the competencies support?

Competency 1: Theologian: Goal 1: To develop awareness of the urgency of positive relationships and strong marriages in the church from a Biblical perspective through covenantal theology.

The competency that best supports my goal is that of theologian because the theologians have training in biblical and scriptural studies and the ability to exegete covenantal theology.

Competency 2: Religious/ Spiritual Educator: Goal 2: To develop with the Site Team an educational workshop that addresses the theological question on forgiveness and reconciliation. “How does the theory of forgiveness leading to reconciliation apply to marriage and relationships?”

This competency best supports my goal because the religious/spiritual educator has the ability to communicate subject matter and religious concepts concerning the spiritual implications of forgiveness and reconciliation.

¹² Rose, Robert, *They Touched my Life*, Philadelphia, PA: Xlibris, 2000.

Competency 3: Preacher/Interpreter of Sacred Texts. Goal 3: To preach a sermon based on how to change the culture and sociological problem that contributes to the decline of African American men as it relates to marriage in the Black church. This competency best supports my goal because as preacher/interpreter of sacred texts, the skilled communicator has the ability to interpret sacred scriptures in a meaningful and effective manner, and also empower one's listeners to grow spiritually.

Appendix A: Timeline

Date	Task/Activity	Tools to Complete Task	Person Responsible
10/15/2018	Proposal Approval By Director		Dr. Keith Russell
10/18/18	Meet with Advisor	Copy of Approval	Dr. Robert Thompson
11/2/18	Goal 1 Strategy 1 1 Day Seminar Planning Session	Speakers (Minister/Theologian) Names and contact numbers	Roger L.Harris
11/16/18	Goal 1 Strategy 2 Update on the Facilitators for Seminar	Estimate of number of participants and resources needed for seminar	Denise Viaer Johnny Patterson
12/7/18	Site Team Meeting on evaluation of the progress for Goal 1 Strategy 1 (Seminar)	Develop format and times for facilitators' presentations. Refreshments and lunch.	Dr. David Hodges
12/9/18	Goal 1 Strategy 3 Promotion/Announcements	A skit from a few of the participants from the pulpit to raise excitement	Jean Perry
Sunday Morning Service 12/16,23, 30/18	Continue to promote Goal 1 Strategy 3	Senior Pastor to announce and put emphasis on the importance of this seminar	Roger L. Harris
1/5/2019	Site Team Meeting: Finalizing all elements of the seminar.	Report from all the members concerning their commitments and assignments	Advisor, Site Team, and Roger L. Harris
1/12/2019	Goal 1-(Seminar) takes place from 10 am to 2 pm	Research/Writing For Goal 1	Roger L. Harris
2/1/2019	Goal 2 - Strategy 1 1 Day Workshop Planning Seccession	Facilitators (Ministers/Theologians) Names and contacts	Roger L. Harris
2/15/19	Goal 2 Strategy 2 3/9/19-Workshop Confirmation of Facilitators/Format/	Cost for Honorariums Supplies/Refreshments/ Lunch	Jean Perry Anthony Means
2/17/19	Goal 2 Strategy 3 Promotion next 3 Sundays	Announcements from the Senior Pastor and participants/Site Team	Norbert Charles

Date	Task/Activity	Tools to Complete Task	Person Responsible
2/23/19	Evaluation of the Process	Site Teams Special Evaluator	Dr. David Hodges
3/1/19	Site Team/Advisor/complete and confirm all Facilitators and those responsible to carry out workshop are in place	Format is in place for facilitators Refreshment and lunch Supplies are available for participants	Roger L. Harris
3/9/19	Goal 2 – Educational Workshop in Process	Research and writing begins	Roger L. Harris
3/23/19	Goal 3 Strategy 1 Date approval for sermon and plan format	Input from Site Team for appropriate text for sermon	Roger L. Harris
3/29/19	Strategy 2- Promotion and Announcements	Commitment from media for DVDS/CDS/and live streaming for participants	Dr. Robert Thompson
4/7, 4/19	Strategy 3- Work on special seating for the participants and how to take notes for sermon	Acknowledgement of the occasion and participants by the Senior Pastor	Jean Perry & Johnny Patterson
4/14/19	Final Announcement and instructions for Site Team and participants	Senior Pastor explains the occasion for this service and the special seating of the participants and Site Team	Anthony Means & Denise Vear
4/14/19	Evaluation forms (Questionnaire) on the Sermon/Content/ Effectiveness are given out and accomplished	Return of the evaluation forms. Site Team and evaluator will give report on the findings	Dr. David Hodges
		Research and Writing on sermon	

Appendix B: Timeline/Budget

Date	Task/Activity	Tools to Complete Task	Cost/Funding
1/12/2019	Goal 1 Seminar on developing positive relationships and strong marriages	Ministers/ Theologians Supply material for the participants Refreshments/Lunch	\$700.00 Church/Site Team/Candidate
3/9/2019	Goal 2 Workshop on forgiveness and reconciliation	Ministers/ Theologians Supply material for the participants Refreshments/Lunch	\$500.00 Donations
4/14/2019	Goal 3 The Preached Word Changing the culture and sociological problems that contribute to the decline	The Preacher is the Candidate (Roger Harris) DVDs for the participants	\$100.00 Donations
12/2019& 2020	Seminar/ Educational Workshop/ Preached Word Refreshments for meeting/ Honorariums/ Editor/ Dissertation	Facilitators/ Store Supplies/ Site Team appreciation gifts/ Candidate/ Editor	\$3,100.00 Donations/ Church/ Candidate/ Site Team

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